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THE MAN WITH THE PALE EYES

by Guy de Maupassant,
from *Masterpieces of Mystery: Mystic-Humorous Stories*
Editor: Joseph Lewis French Project Gutenberg EBook #23432

Monsieur Pierre AgØnor de Vargnes, the Examining Magistrate, was the exact opposite of a practical joker. He was dignity, staidness, correctness personified. As a sedate man, he was quite incapable of being guilty, even in his dreams, of anything resembling a practical joke, however remotely. I know nobody to whom he could be compared, unless it be the present president of the French Republic. I think it is useless to carry the analogy any further, and having said thus much, it will be easily understood that a cold shiver passed through me when Monsieur Pierre AgØnor de Vargnes did me the honour of sending a lady to await on me.

At about eight o'clock, one morning last winter, as he was leaving the house to go to the _Palais de Justice_, his footman handed him a card, on which was printed:

DOCTOR JAMES FERDINAND,
_Member of the Academy of Medicine,
Port-au-Prince,
Chevalier of the Legion of Honour._

At the bottom of the card there was written in pencil: _From Lady Frogłre_.

Monsieur de Vargnes knew the lady very well, who was a very agreeable Creole from Hayti, and whom he had met in many drawing-rooms, and, on the other hand, though the doctor's name did not awaken any recollections in him, his quality and titles alone required that he should grant him an interview, however short it might be. Therefore, although he was in a hurry to get out, Monsieur de Vargnes told the footman to show in his early visitor, but to tell him beforehand that his master was much pressed for time, as he had to go to the Law Courts.

When the doctor came in, in spite of his usual imperturbability, he could not restrain a movement of surprise, for the doctor presented that strange anomaly of being a negro of the purest, blackest type, with the eyes of a white man, of a man from the North, pale, cold, clear blue eyes, and his surprise increased, when, after a few words of excuse for his untimely visit, he added, with an enigmatical smile:

"My eyes surprise you, do they not? I was sure that they would, and, to

tell you the truth, I came here in order that you might look at them well, and never forget them."

His smile, and his words, even more than his smile, seemed to be those of a madman. He spoke very softly, with that childish, lisping voice, which is peculiar to negroes, and his mysterious, almost menacing words, consequently, sounded all the more as if they were uttered at random by a man bereft of his reason. But his looks, the looks of those pale, cold, clear blue eyes, were certainly not those of a madman. They clearly expressed menace, yes, menace, as well as irony, and, above all, implacable ferocity, and their glance was like a flash of lightning, which one could never forget.

"I have seen," Monsieur de Vargnes used to say, when speaking about it, "the looks of many murderers, but in none of them have I ever observed such a depth of crime, and of impudent security in crime."

And this impression was so strong, that Monsieur de Vargnes thought that he was the sport of some hallucination, especially as when he spoke about his eyes, the doctor continued with a smile, and in his most childish accents: "Of course, Monsieur, you cannot understand what I am saying to you, and I must beg your pardon for it. To-morrow you will receive a letter which will explain it all to you, but, first of all, it was necessary that I should let you have a good, a careful look at my eyes, my eyes, which are myself, my only and true self, as you will see."

With these words, and with a polite bow, the doctor went out, leaving Monsieur de Vargnes extremely surprised, and a prey to this doubt, as he said to himself:

"Is he merely a madman? The fierce expression, and the criminal depths of his looks are perhaps caused merely by the extraordinary contrast between his fierce looks and his pale eyes."

And absorbed by these thoughts, Monsieur de Vargnes unfortunately allowed several minutes to elapse, and then he thought to himself suddenly:

"No, I am not the sport of any hallucination, and this is no case of an optical phenomenon. This man is evidently some terrible criminal, and I have altogether failed in my duty in not arresting him myself at once, illegally, even at the risk of my life."

The judge ran downstairs in pursuit of the doctor but it was too late; he had disappeared. In the afternoon, he called on Madame Frogłre, to ask her whether she could tell him anything about the matter. She, however, did not know the negro doctor in the least, and was even able

to assure him that he was a fictitious personage, for, as she was well acquainted with the upper classes in Hayti, she knew that the Academy of Medicine at Port-au-Prince had no doctor of that name among its members. As Monsieur de Vargnes persisted, and gave descriptions of the doctor, especially mentioning his extraordinary eyes, Madame FrogŁre began to laugh and said:

"You have certainly had to do with a hoaxer, my dear monsieur. The eyes which you have described are certainly those of a white man, and the individual must have been painted."

On thinking it over, Monsieur de Vargnes remembered that the doctor had nothing of the negro about him, but his black skin, his woolly hair and beard, and his way of speaking, which was easily imitated, but nothing of the negro, not even the characteristic, undulating walk. Perhaps, after all, he was only a practical joker, and during the whole day, Monsieur de Vargnes took refuge in that view, which rather wounded his dignity as a man of consequence, but which appeased his scruples as a magistrate.

The next day, he received the promised letter, which was written, as well as addressed, in letters cut out of the newspapers. It was as follows:

* * * * *

"MONSIEUR: Doctor James Ferdinand does not exist, but the man whose eyes you saw does, and you will certainly recognize his eyes. This man has committed two crimes, for which he does not feel any remorse, but, as he is a psychologist, he is afraid of some day yielding to the irresistible temptation of confessing his crimes. You know better than anyone (and that is your most powerful aid), with what imperious force criminals, especially intellectual ones, feel this temptation. That great poet, Edgar Poe, has written masterpieces on this subject, which express the truth exactly, but he has omitted to mention the last phenomenon, which I will tell you. Yes, I, a criminal, feel a terrible wish for somebody to know of my crimes, and when this requirement is satisfied, my secret has been revealed to a confidant, I shall be tranquil for the future, and be freed from this demon of perversity, which only tempts us once. Well! Now that is accomplished. You shall have my secret; from the day that you recognize me by my eyes, you will try and find out what I am guilty of, and how I was guilty, and you will discover it, being a master of your profession, which, by the by, has procured you the honour of having been chosen by me to bear the weight of this secret, which now is shared by us, and by us two alone. I say, advisedly, _by us two alone_. You could not, as a matter of fact, prove the reality of this secret to anyone, unless

I were to confess it, and I defy you to obtain my public confession, as I have confessed it to you, _and without danger to myself_."

* * * * *

Three months later, Monsieur de Vargnes met Monsieur X---- at an evening party, and at first sight, and without the slightest hesitation, he recognized in him those very pale, very cold, and very clear blue eyes, eyes which it was impossible to forget.

The man himself remained perfectly impassive, so that Monsieur de Vargnes was forced to say to himself:

"Probably I am the sport of an hallucination at this moment, or else there are two pairs of eyes that are perfectly similar in the world. And what eyes! Can it be possible?"

The magistrate instituted inquiries into his life, and he discovered this, which removed all his doubts.

Five years previously, Monsieur X---- had been a very poor, but very brilliant medical student, who, although he never took his doctor's degree, had already made himself remarkable by his microbiological researches.

A young and very rich widow had fallen in love with him and married him. She had one child by her first marriage, and in the space of six months, first the child and then the mother died of typhoid fever, and thus Monsieur X---- had inherited a large fortune, in due form, and without any possible dispute. Everybody said that he had attended to the two patients with the utmost devotion. Now, were these two deaths the two crimes mentioned in his letter?

But then, Monsieur X---- must have poisoned his two victims with the microbes of typhoid fever, which he had skilfully cultivated in them, so as to make the disease incurable, even by the most devoted care and attention. Why not?

"Do you believe it?" I asked Monsieur de Vargnes.

"Absolutely," he replied. "And the most terrible thing about it is, that the villain is right when he defies me to force him to confess his crime publicly, for I see no means of obtaining a confession, none whatever. For a moment, I thought of magnetism, but who could magnetize that man with those pale, cold, bright eyes? With such eyes, he would force the magnetizer to denounce himself as the culprit."

And then he said, with a deep sigh:

"Ah! Formerly there was something good about justice!"

And when he saw my inquiring looks, he added in a firm and perfectly convinced voice:

"Formerly, justice had torture at its command."

"Upon my word," I replied, with all an author's unconscious and simple egotism, "it is quite certain that without the torture, this strange tale will have no conclusion, and that is very unfortunate, as far as regards the story I intended to make out of it."

Maud Muller Mutatur

from *Something Else Again*, by Franklin P. Adams
Project Gutenberg EBook #26797

> In 1909 toilet goods were not considered a serious matter and no special department of the catalogs was devoted to it. A few perfumes and creams were scattered here and there among bargain goods.
>
> In 1919 an assortment of perfumes that would rival any city department store is shown, along with six pages of other toilet articles, including rouge and eyebrow pencils.
>
> _--From "How the Farmer Has Changed in a Decade: Toilet Goods," in Farm and Fireside's advertisement._

Maud Muller, on a summer's day,
Powdered her nose with _Bon Sachet_.

Beneath her lingerie hat appeared
Eyebrows and cheeks that were well veneered.

Singing she rocked on the front piazz,
To the tune of "The Land of the Sky Blue Jazz."

But the song expired on the summer air,
And she said "This won't get me anywhere."

The judge in his car looked up at her
And signalled "Stop!" to his brave chauffeur.

He smiled a smile that is known as broad,
And he said to Miss Muller, "Hello, how's Maud?"

"What sultry weather this is? Gee whiz!"
Said Maud. Said the judge, "I'll say it is."

"Your coat is heavy. Why don't you shed it?
Have a drink?" said Maud. Said the judge, "You said it."

And Maud, with the joy of bucolic youth,
Blended some gin and some French vermouth.

Maud Muller sighed, as she poured the gin,
"I've got something on Whittier's heroine."

"Thanks," said the judge, "a peppier brew
From a fairer hand was never knew."

And when the judge had had number 7,
Maud seemed an angel direct from Heaven.

And the judge declared, "You're a lovely girl,
An' I'm for you, Maudie, I'll tell the worl'."

And the judge said, "Marry me, Maudie dearie?"
And Maud said yes to the well known query.

And she often thinks, in her rustic way,
As she powders her nose with _Bon Sachet_,

"I never'n the world would 'a got that guy,
If I'd waited till after the First o' July."

And of all glad words of prose or rhyme,
The gladdest are, "Act while there yet is time."

THE LOS AMIGOS FIASCO

from *Tales of Twilight and the Unseen*, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
Project Gutenberg Ebook #32777

I used to be the leading practitioner of Los Amigos. Of course, every one has heard of the great electrical generating gear there. The town is wide spread, and there are dozens of little townlets and villages all around, which receive their supply from the same centre, so that the works are on a very large scale. The Los Amigos folk say that they are the largest upon earth, but then we claim that for everything in Los Amigos except the gaol and the death-rate. Those are said to be the smallest.

Now, with so fine an electrical supply, it seemed to be a sinful waste of hemp that the Los Amigos criminals should perish in the old-fashioned manner. And then came the news of the electrocutions in the East, and how the results had not after all been so instantaneous as had been hoped. The Western engineers raised their eyebrows when they read of the puny shocks by which these men had perished, and they vowed in Los Amigos that when an irreclaimable came their way he should be dealt handsomely by, and have the run of all the big dynamos. There should be no reserve, said the engineers, but he should have all that they had got. And what the result of that would be none could predict, save that it must be absolutely blasting and deadly. Never before had a man been so charged with electricity as they would charge him. He was to be smitten by the essence of ten thunderbolts. Some prophesied combustion, and some disintegration and disappearance. They were waiting eagerly to settle the question by actual demonstration, and it was just at that moment that Duncan Warner came that way.

Warner had been wanted by the law, and by nobody else, for many years. Desperado, murderer, train robber, and road agent, he was a man beyond the pale of human pity. He had deserved a dozen deaths, and the Los Amigos folk grudged him so gaudy a one as that. He seemed to feel himself to be unworthy of it, for he made two frenzied attempts at escape. He was a powerful, muscular man, with a lion heart, tangled black locks, and a sweeping beard which covered his broad chest. When he was tried, there was no finer head in all the crowded court. It's no new thing to find the best face looking from the dock. But his good looks could not balance his bad deeds. His advocate did all he knew, but the cards lay against him, and Duncan Warner was handed over to the mercy of the big Los Amigos dynamos.

I was there at the committee meeting when the matter was discussed. The town council had chosen four experts to look after the arrangements. Three of them were admirable. There was Joseph M'Connor, the very man

who had designed the dynamos, and there was Joshua Westmacott, the chairman of the Los Amigos Electrical Supply Company, Limited. Then there was myself as the chief medical man, and lastly an old German of the name of Peter Stulpnagel. The Germans were a strong body at Los Amigos, and they all voted for their man. That was how he got on the committee. It was said that he had been a wonderful electrician at home, and he was eternally working with wires and insulators and Leyden jars; but, as he never seemed to get any further, or to have any results worth publishing, he came at last to be regarded as a harmless crank, who had made science his hobby. We three practical men smiled when we heard that he had been elected as our colleague, and at the meeting we fixed it all up very nicely among ourselves without much thought of the old fellow who sat with his ears scooped forward in his hands, for he was a trifle hard of hearing, taking no more part in the proceedings than the gentlemen of the press who scribbled their notes on the back benches.

We did not take long to settle it all. In New York a strength of some two thousand volts had been used, and death had not been instantaneous. Evidently their shock had been too weak. Los Amigos should not fall into that error. The charge should be six times greater, and therefore, of course, it would be six times more effective. Nothing could possibly be more logical. The whole concentrated force of the great dynamos should be employed on Duncan Warner.

So we three settled it, and had already risen to break up the meeting, when our silent companion opened his mouth for the first time.

"Gentlemen," said he, "you appear to me to show an extraordinary ignorance upon the subject of electricity. You have not mastered the first principles of its actions upon a human being."

The committee was about to break into an angry reply to this brusque comment, but the chairman of the Electrical Company tapped his forehead to claim its indulgence for the crankiness of the speaker.

"Pray tell us, sir," said he, with an ironical smile, "what is there in our conclusions with which you find fault?"

"With your assumption that a large dose of electricity will merely increase the effect of a small dose. Do you not think it possible that it might have an entirely different result? Do you know anything, by actual experiment, of the effect of such powerful shocks?"

"We know it by analogy," said the chairman pompously. "All drugs increase their effect when they increase their dose; for example--for example----"

"Whisky," said Joseph M'Connor.

"Quite so. Whisky. You see it there."

Peter Stulpnagel smiled and shook his head.

"Your argument is not very good," said he. "When I used to take whisky, I used to find that one glass would excite me, but that six would send me to sleep, which is just the opposite. Now, suppose that electricity were to act in just the opposite way also, what then?"

We three practical men burst out laughing. We had known that our colleague was queer, but we never had thought that he would be as queer as this.

"What then?" repeated Peter Stulpnagel.

"We'll take our chances," said the chairman.

"Pray consider," said Peter, "that workmen who have touched the wires, and who have received shocks of only a few hundred volts, have died instantly. The fact is well known. And yet when a much greater force was used upon a criminal at New York, the man struggled for some little time. Do you not clearly see that the smaller dose is the more deadly?"

"I think, gentlemen, that this discussion has been carried on quite long enough," said the chairman, rising again. "The point, I take it, has already been decided by the majority of the committee, and Duncan Warner shall be electrocuted on Tuesday by the full strength of the Los Amigos dynamos. Is it not so?"

"I agree," said Joseph M'Connor.

"I agree," said I.

"And I protest," said Peter Stulpnagel.

"Then the motion is carried, and your protest will be duly entered in the minutes," said the chairman, and so the sitting was dissolved.

The attendance at the electrocution was a very small one. We four members of the committee were, of course, present with the executioner, who was to act under their orders. The others were the United States Marshal, the governor of the gaol, the chaplain, and three members of the press. The room was a small brick chamber, forming an out-house to the Central Electrical station. It had been used as a laundry, and had an oven and copper at one side, but no other furniture save a single chair for the condemned man. A metal plate for his feet was placed in

front of it, to which ran a thick insulated wire. Above, another wire depended from the ceiling, which could be connected with a small metallic rod projecting from a cap which was to be placed upon his head. When this connection was established Duncan Warner's hour was come.

There was a solemn hush as we waited for the coming of the prisoner. The practical engineers looked a little pale, and fidgeted nervously with the wires. Even the hardened Marshal was ill at ease, for a mere hanging was one thing, and this blasting of flesh and blood a very different one. As to the pressmen, their faces were whiter than the sheets which lay before them. The only man who appeared to feel none of the influence of these preparations was the little German crank, who strolled from one to the other with a smile on his lips and mischief in his eyes. More than once he even went so far as to burst into a shout of laughter, until the chaplain sternly rebuked him for his ill-timed levity.

"How can you so far forget yourself, Mr. Stulpnagel," said he, "as to jest in the presence of death?"

But the German was quite unabashed.

"If I were in the presence of death I should not jest," said he, "but since I am not I may do what I choose."

This flippant reply was about to draw another and a sterner reproof from the chaplain, when the door was swung open and two warders entered leading Duncan Warner between them. He glanced round him with a set face, stepped resolutely forward, and seated himself upon the chair.

"Touch her off!" said he.

It was barbarous to keep him in suspense. The chaplain murmured a few words in his ear, the attendant placed the cap upon his head, and then, while we all held our breath, the wire and the metal were brought in contact.

"Great Scott!" shouted Duncan Warner.

He had bounded in his chair as the frightful shock crashed through his system. But he was not dead. On the contrary, his eyes gleamed far more brightly than they had done before. There was only one change, but it was a singular one. The black had passed from his hair and beard as the shadow passes from a landscape. They were both as white as snow. And yet there was no other sign of decay. His skin was smooth and plump and lustrous as a child's.

The Marshal looked at the committee with a reproachful eye.

"There seems to be some hitch here, gentlemen," said he.

We three practical men looked at each other.

Peter Stulpnagel smiled pensively.

"I think that another one should do it," said I.

Again the connection was made, and again Duncan Warner sprang in his chair and shouted, but, indeed, were it not that he still remained in the chair none of us would have recognised him. His hair and his beard had shredded off in an instant, and the room looked like a barber's shop on a Saturday night. There he sat, his eyes still shining, his skin radiant with the glow of perfect health, but with a scalp as bald as a Dutch cheese, and a chin without so much as a trace of down. He began to revolve one of his arms, slowly and doubtfully at first, but with more confidence as he went on.

"That joint," said he, "has puzzled half the doctors on the Pacific slope. It's as good as new, and as limber as a hickory twig."

"You are feeling pretty well?" asked the old German.

"Never better in my life," said Duncan Warner cheerily.

The situation was a painful one. The Marshal glared at the committee. Peter Stulpnagel grinned and rubbed his hands. The engineers scratched their heads. The bald-headed prisoner revolved his arm and looked pleased.

"I think that one more shock----" began the chairman.

"No, sir," said the Marshal; "we've had foolery enough for one morning. We are here for an execution, and an execution we'll have."

"What do you propose?"

"There's a hook handy upon the ceiling. Fetch a rope, and we'll soon set this matter straight."

There was another awkward delay while the warders departed for the cord. Peter Stulpnagel bent over Duncan Warner, and whispered something in his ear. The desperado stared in surprise.

"You don't say?" he asked.

The German nodded.

"What! No ways?"

Peter shook his head, and the two began to laugh as though they shared some huge joke between them.

The rope was brought, and the Marshal himself slipped the noose over the criminal's neck. Then the two warders, the assistant and he swung their victim into the air. For half an hour he hung--a dreadful sight--from the ceiling. Then in solemn silence they lowered him down, and one of the warders went out to order the shell to be brought round. But as he touched ground again what was our amazement when Duncan Warner put his hands up to his neck, loosened the noose, and took a long, deep breath.

"Paul Jefferson's sale is goin' well," he remarked, "I could see the crowd from up yonder," and he nodded at the hook in the ceiling.

"Up with him again!" shouted the Marshal, "we'll get the life out of him somehow."

In an instant the victim was up at the hook once more.

They kept him there for an hour, but when he came down he was perfectly garrulous.

"Old man Plunket goes too much to the Arcady Saloon," said he. "Three times he's been there in an hour; and him with a family. Old man Plunket would do well to swear off."

It was monstrous and incredible, but there it was. There was no getting round it. The man was there talking when he ought to have been dead. We all sat staring in amazement, but United States Marshal Carpenter was not a man to be euchred so easily. He motioned the others to one side, so that the prisoner was left standing alone.

"Duncan Warner," said he slowly, "you are here to play your part, and I am here to play mine. Your game is to live if you can, and my game is to carry out the sentence of the law. You've beat us on electricity, I'll give you one there. And you've beat us on hanging, for you seem to thrive on it. But it's my turn to beat you now, for my duty has to be done."

He pulled a six-shooter from his coat as he spoke, and fired all the shots through the body of the prisoner. The room was so filled with smoke that we could see nothing, but when it cleared the prisoner was still standing there, looking down in disgust at the front of his coat.

"Coats must be cheap where you come from," said he. "Thirty dollars it cost me, and look at it now. The six holes in front are bad enough, but

four of the balls have passed out, and a pretty fine state the back must be in."

The Marshal's revolver fell from his hand, and he dropped his arms to his sides, a beaten man.

"Maybe some of you gentlemen can tell me what this means," said he, looking helplessly at the committee.

Peter Stulpnagel took a step forward.

"I'll tell you all about it," said he.

"You seem to be the only person who knows anything."

"I _am_ the only person who knows anything. I should have warned these gentlemen; but, as they would not listen to me, I have allowed them to learn by experience. What you have done with your electricity is that you have increased the man's vitality until he can deny death for centuries."

"Centuries!"

"Yes, it will take the wear of hundreds of years to exhaust the enormous nervous energy with which you have drenched him. Electricity is life, and you have charged him with it to the utmost. Perhaps in fifty years you might execute him, but I am not sanguine about it."

"Great Scott! What shall I do with him?" cried the unhappy Marshal.

Peter Stulpnagel shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems to me that it does not much matter what you do with him now," said he.

"Maybe we could drain the electricity out of him again. Suppose we hang him up by the heels?"

"No, no, it's out of the question."

"Well, well, he shall do no more mischief in Los Amigos, anyhow," said the Marshal, with decision. "He shall go into the new gaol. The prison will wear him out."

"On the contrary," said Peter Stulpnagel, "I think that it is much more probable that he will wear out the prison."

It was rather a fiasco, and for years we didn't talk more about it than

we could help, but it's no secret now, and I thought you might like to jot down the facts in your case-book.

A MAN OF HABIT

from *Sketches in Lavender, Blue and Green*, by Jerome K. Jerome
eBook #2234

There were three of us in the smoke-room of the _Alexandra_--a very good friend of mine, myself, and, in the opposite corner, a shy-looking, unobtrusive man, the editor, as we subsequently learned, of a New York Sunday paper.

My friend and I were discussing habits, good and bad.

"After the first few months," said my friend, "it is no more effort for a man to be a saint than to be a sinner; it becomes a mere matter of habit."

"I know," I interrupted, "it is every whit as easy to spring out of bed the instant you are called as to say 'All Right,' and turn over for just another five minutes' snooze, when you have got into the way of it. It is no more trouble not to swear than to swear, if you make a custom of it. Toast and water is as delicious as champagne, when you have acquired the taste for it. Things are also just as easy the other way about. It is a mere question of making your choice and sticking to it."

He agreed with me.

"Now take these cigars of mine," he said, pushing his open case towards me.

"Thank you," I replied hurriedly, "I'm not smoking this passage."

"Don't be alarmed," he answered, "I meant merely as an argument. Now one of these would make you wretched for a week."

I admitted his premise.

"Very well," he continued. "Now I, as you know, smoke them all day long, and enjoy them. Why? Because I have got into the habit. Years ago, when I was a young man, I smoked expensive Havanas. I found that I was ruining myself. It was absolutely necessary that I should take a cheaper weed. I was living in Belgium at the time, and a friend showed me these. I don't know what they are--probably cabbage leaves soaked in guano; they tasted to me like that at first--but they were cheap. Buying them by the five hundred, they cost me three a penny. I determined to like them, and started with one a day. It was terrible work, I admit, but as I said to myself, nothing could be worse than the Havanas themselves had been in the beginning. Smoking is an acquired taste, and it must be as easy to

learn to like one flavour as another. I persevered and I conquered. Before the year was over I could think of them without loathing, at the end of two I could smoke them without positive discomfort. Now I prefer them to any other brand on the market. Indeed, a good cigar disagrees with me."

I suggested it might have been less painful to have given up smoking altogether.

"I did think of it," he replied, "but a man who doesn't smoke always seems to me bad company. There is something very sociable about smoke."

He leant back and puffed great clouds into the air, filling the small den with an odour suggestive of bilge water and cemeteries.

"Then again," he resumed after a pause, "take my claret. No, you don't like it." (I had not spoken, but my face had evidently betrayed me.) "Nobody does, at least no one I have ever met. Three years ago, when I was living in Hammersmith, we caught two burglars with it. They broke open the sideboard, and swallowed five bottlefuls between them. A policeman found them afterwards, sitting on a doorstep a hundred yards off, the 'swag' beside them in a carpet bag. They were too ill to offer any resistance, and went to the station like lambs, he promising to send the doctor to them the moment they were safe in the cells. Ever since then I have left out a decanterful upon the table every night.

"Well, I like that claret, and it does me good. I come in sometimes dead beat. I drink a couple of glasses, and I'm a new man. I took to it in the first instance for the same reason that I took to the cigars--it was cheap. I have it sent over direct from Geneva, and it costs me six shillings a dozen. How they do it I don't know. I don't want to know. As you may remember, it's fairly heady and there's body in it.

"I knew one man," he continued, "who had a regular Mrs. Caudle of a wife. All day long she talked to him, or at him, or of him, and at night he fell asleep to the rising and falling rhythm of what she thought about him. At last she died, and his friends congratulated him, telling him that now he would enjoy peace. But it was the peace of the desert, and the man did not enjoy it. For two-and-twenty years her voice had filled the house, penetrated through the conservatory, and floated in faint shrilly waves of sound round the garden, and out into the road beyond. The silence now pervading everywhere frightened and disturbed him. The place was no longer home to him. He missed the breezy morning insult, the long winter evening's reproaches beside the flickering fire. At night he could not sleep. For hours he would lie tossing restlessly, his ears aching for the accustomed soothing flow of invective.

"'Ah!' he would cry bitterly to himself, 'it is the old story, we never

know the value of a thing until we have lost it.'

"He grew ill. The doctors dosed him with sleeping draughts in vain. At last they told him bluntly that his life depended upon his finding another wife, able and willing to nag him to sleep.

"There were plenty of wives of the type he wanted in the neighbourhood, but the unmarried women were, of necessity, inexperienced, and his health was such that he could not afford the time to train them.

"Fortunately, just as despair was about to take possession of him, a man died in the next parish, literally talked to death, the gossip said, by his wife. He obtained an introduction, and called upon her the day after the funeral. She was a cantankerous old woman, and the wooing was a harassing affair, but his heart was in his work, and before six months were gone he had won her for his own.

"She proved, however, but a poor substitute. The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. She had neither that command of language nor of wind that had distinguished her rival. From his favourite seat at the bottom of the garden he could not hear her at all, so he had his chair brought up into the conservatory. It was all right for him there so long as she continued to abuse him; but every now and again, just as he was getting comfortably settled down with his pipe and his newspaper, she would suddenly stop.

"He would drop his paper and sit listening, with a troubled, anxious expression.

"'Are you there, dear?' he would call out after a while.

"'Yes, I'm here. Where do you think I am you old fool?' she would gasp back in an exhausted voice.

"His face would brighten at the sound of her words. 'Go on, dear,' he would answer. 'I'm listening. I like to hear you talk.'

"But the poor woman was utterly pumped out, and had not so much as a snort left.

"Then he would shake his head sadly. 'No, she hasn't poor dear Susan's flow,' he would say. 'Ah! what a woman that was!'

"At night she would do her best, but it was a lame and halting performance by comparison. After rating him for little over three-quarters of an hour, she would sink back on the pillow, and want to go to sleep. But he would shake her gently by the shoulder.

"'Yes, dear,' he would say, 'you were speaking about Jane, and the way I kept looking at her during lunch.'

"It's extraordinary," concluded my friend, lighting a fresh cigar, "what creatures of habit we are."

"Very," I replied. "I knew a man who told tall stories till when he told a true one nobody believed it."

"Ah, that was a very sad case," said my friend.

"Speaking of habit," said the unobtrusive man in the corner, "I can tell you a true story that I'll bet my bottom dollar you won't believe."

"Haven't got a bottom dollar, but I'll bet you half a sovereign I do," replied my friend, who was of a sporting turn. "Who shall be judge?"

"I'll take your word for it," said the unobtrusive man, and started straight away.

* * * * *

"He was a Jefferson man, this man I'm going to tell you of," he begun. "He was born in the town, and for forty-seven years he never slept a night outside it. He was a most respectable man--a drysalter from nine to four, and a Presbyterian in his leisure moments. He said that a good life merely meant good habits. He rose at seven, had family prayer at seven-thirty, breakfasted at eight, got to his business at nine, had his horse brought round to the office at four, and rode for an hour, reached home at five, had a bath and a cup of tea, played with and read to the children (he was a domesticated man) till half-past six, dressed and dined at seven, went round to the club and played whist till quarter after ten, home again to evening prayer at ten-thirty, and bed at eleven. For five-and-twenty years he lived that life with never a variation. It worked into his system and became mechanical. The church clocks were set by him. He was used by the local astronomers to check the sun.

"One day a distant connection of his in London, an East Indian Merchant and an ex-Lord Mayor died, leaving him sole legatee and executor. The business was a complicated one and needed management. He determined to leave his son by his first wife, now a young man of twenty-four, in charge at Jefferson, and to establish himself with his second family in England, and look after the East Indian business.

"He set out from Jefferson City on October the fourth, and arrived in London on the seventeenth. He had been ill during the whole of the voyage, and he reached the furnished house he had hired in Bayswater somewhat of a wreck. A couple of days in bed, however, pulled him round,

and on the Wednesday evening he announced his intention of going into the City the next day to see to his affairs.

"On the Thursday morning he awoke at one o'clock. His wife told him she had not disturbed him, thinking the sleep would do him good. He admitted that perhaps it had. Anyhow, he felt very well, and he got up and dressed himself. He said he did not like the idea of beginning his first day by neglecting a religious duty, and his wife agreeing with him, they assembled the servants and the children in the dining-room, and had family prayer at half-past one. After which he breakfasted and set off, reaching the City about three.

"His reputation for punctuality had preceded him, and surprise was everywhere expressed at his late arrival. He explained the circumstances, however, and made his appointments for the following day to commence from nine-thirty.

"He remained at the office until late, and then went home. For dinner, usually the chief meal of the day, he could manage to eat only a biscuit and some fruit. He attributed his loss of appetite to want of his customary ride. He was strangely unsettled all the evening. He said he supposed he missed his game of whist, and determined to look about him without loss of time for some quiet, respectable club. At eleven he retired with his wife to bed, but could not sleep. He tossed and turned, and turned and tossed, but grew only more and more wakeful and energetic. A little after midnight an overpowering desire seized him to go and wish the children good-night. He slipped on a dressing-gown and stole into the nursery. He did not intend it, but the opening of the door awoke them, and he was glad. He wrapped them up in the quilt, and, sitting on the edge of the bed, told them moral stories till one o'clock.

"Then he kissed them, bidding them be good and go to sleep; and finding himself painfully hungry, crept downstairs, where in the back kitchen he made a hearty meal off cold game pie and cucumber.

"He retired to bed feeling more peaceful, yet still could not sleep, so lay thinking about his business affairs till five, when he dropped off.

"At one o'clock to the minute he awoke. His wife told him she had made every endeavour to rouse him, but in vain. The man was vexed and irritated. If he had not been a very good man indeed, I believe he would have sworn. The same programme was repeated as on the Thursday, and again he reached the City at three.

"This state of things went on for a month. The man fought against himself, but was unable to alter himself. Every morning, or rather every afternoon at one he awoke. Every night at one he crept down into the kitchen and foraged for food. Every morning at five he fell asleep.

"He could not understand it, nobody could understand it. The doctor treated him for water on the brain, hypnotic irresponsibility and hereditary lunacy. Meanwhile his business suffered, and his health grew worse. He seemed to be living upside down. His days seemed to have neither beginning nor end, but to be all middle. There was no time for exercise or recreation. When he began to feel cheerful and sociable everybody else was asleep.

"One day by chance the explanation came. His eldest daughter was preparing her home studies after dinner.

"'What time is it now in New York?' she asked, looking up from her geography book.

"'New York,' said her father, glancing at his watch, 'let me see. It's just ten now, and there's a little over four and a half hours' difference. Oh, about half-past five in the afternoon.'

"'Then in Jefferson,' said the mother, 'it would be still earlier, wouldn't it?'

"'Yes,' replied the girl, examining the map, 'Jefferson is nearly two degrees further west.'

"'Two degrees,' mused the father, 'and there's forty minutes to a degree. That would make it now, at the present moment in Jefferson--'

"He leaped to his feet with a cry:

"'I've got it!' he shouted, 'I see it.'

"'See what?' asked his wife, alarmed.

"'Why, it's four o'clock in Jefferson, and just time for my ride. That's what I'm wanting.'

"There could be no doubt about it. For five-and-twenty years he had lived by clockwork. But it was by Jefferson clockwork, not London clockwork. He had changed his longitude, but not himself. The habits of a quarter of a century were not to be shifted at the bidding of the sun.

"He examined the problem in all its bearings, and decided that the only solution was for him to return to the order of his old life. He saw the difficulties in his way, but they were less than those he was at present encountering. He was too formed by habit to adapt himself to circumstances. Circumstances must adapt themselves to him.

"He fixed his office hours from three till ten, leaving himself at half-past nine. At ten he mounted his horse and went for a canter in the Row, and on very dark nights he carried a lantern. News of it got abroad, and crowds would assemble to see him ride past.

"He dined at one o'clock in the morning, and afterwards strolled down to his club. He had tried to discover a quiet, respectable club where the members were willing to play whist till four in the morning, but failing, had been compelled to join a small Soho gambling-hell, where they taught him poker. The place was occasionally raided by the police, but thanks to his respectable appearance, he generally managed to escape.

"At half-past four he returned home, and woke up the family for evening prayers. At five he went to bed and slept like a top.

"The City chaffed him, and Bayswater shook its head over him, but that he did not mind. The only thing that really troubled him was loss of spiritual communion. At five o'clock on Sunday afternoons he felt he wanted chapel, but had to do without it. At seven he ate his simple mid-day meal. At eleven he had tea and muffins, and at midnight he began to crave again for hymns and sermons. At three he had a bread-and-cheese supper, and retired early at four a.m., feeling sad and unsatisfied.

"He was essentially a man of habit."

* * * * *

The unobtrusive stranger ceased, and we sat gazing in silence at the ceiling.

At length my friend rose, and taking half-a-sovereign from his pocket, laid it upon the table, and linking his arm in mine went out with me upon the deck.

THE LAD WHO OUTSANG THE STARS

from *Leerie*, by Ruth Sawyer
EBook #32959

In the American Military Hospital No. 10 one could always count on Ward 7-A beginning the day with a genuine fanfare of good spirits--that is to say, ever since that ward had acquired a distinction and personality of its own. On this particular morning the doors of the wards were open, for orderlies were scrubbing floors, and Sheila O'Leary in the operating-room above could catch the words of the third chorus that had rung through the hospital since the ban of silence had been raised.

"Gra-ma-cree ma-cruiskeen, Slainte-geal ma-vour-neen,
Gra-ma-cree a-coolin bawn, bawn, bawn,
Oh!"

As usual, Larry's crescendo boomed in the lead. How those lads could sing!

In the regular order of things it was time for dressings; but the regular order of things was so often broken at No. 10 that it had nearly become a myth. The operating staff had been steadily at it since eleven the night before. If nothing more came in, they might be through by eleven now and the dressings come only two hours late. That would be rare good luck. Under the spell of the singing the tired backs of surgeons and nurses straightened unconsciously; cramped muscles seemed to lose some of their kinks; everybody smiled without knowing it--down to the last of the boys who were waiting their turn in the corridor outside. The boys had not been in the hospital long enough to know anything about Ward 7-A, but the challenge to courage and good spirits in that chorus of voices was too dominant to be denied, even among the sorest wounded of them. One after another rallied to it like veterans.

"Gra-ma-cree ma-cruiskeen bawn," boomed Larry's voice to the finish.

The chief of the Surgical Staff looked at Sheila as she handed him the sutures he was reaching for. "They're the best we've had yet, eh? Not one with half a fighting chance, and just listen to the ones who are pulling through."

"They're Irish." There was a tinge of pride in the nurse's voice.

The chief smiled. "It's like flipping a coin to find out whether you're more Irish or American. Sometimes it's heads, sometimes it's tails. Which is it, honestly?"

"Honestly, both!" Sheila laughed softly. Then the door opened to admit the

last of the stretchers, and she sobered for an instant until she saw the faces of the boys. She knew why they were smiling, and her eyes shone in the old luminous, Leerie fashion as she greeted them, each as if he had been an old friend.

"There's a welcome for you. Those lads you hear have gone through what you are going through, only a lot worse. Listen, and think of that as you go under. They'll be singing again in a moment." And as she slipped the ether cone over the face of the first, up from Ward 7-A in rollicking cadences came another chorus:

"Wi' me bundle on me shoulder, sure, there's not a man that's bolder--
I am leavin' dear old Ireland without warnin'.
For I've lately took the notion for to cross the briny ocean,
An' I'm off for Philadelphia in the mornin'."

The smile on the face of the first boy spread to a grin under its covering of gauze. "I'm off for Philadelphia, too," he mumbled, thickly, and the eyes that looked into Sheila's for a few last nebulous seconds showed all the comfortable security of a child's.

They were hard at it for another hour, and while Sheila O'Leary's hands flew from sterilizer to ether cone, from handing instruments and holding forceps to tying sutures and packing wounds, her mind was busy with something that lay far beyond. To this girl, who had come across to do her bit, life had become a jumble of paradoxes. She had come to give, out of the bounty of her skill and her womanhood; instead she had received far more abundantly from the largess of universal brotherhood and sacrifice. She had come to minister, and she had been ministered unto by every piece of human wreckage swept across the door-sill of the hospital. She had thought to dispense life, and to her ever-increasing wonder she had been given a life so boundless that it reached beyond all previous dreams of space or time. She was learning what thousands had been learning since the war began, those who had thrown their fortunes into its crucible, and that is that if anything comes out at all, it comes out in the form of spirit and not of flesh.

Back in the old days at the sanitarium she had felt herself bound only to the problems and emergencies of war. It had never occurred to her then that in an incredibly short time she would be bothering about matters of adjustment afterward. With peace already on the horizon, she was troubled a hundredfold more than she had been when indefinite war was the promise for the future. From the beginning she had marveled at the buoyancy and optimism of the men who were focusing their lives within the limits of each day. Many of them never thought in terms of more than twenty-four hours; often it was less. They had learned the knack of intensive living. World-old truths were flashed into their minds like spot-lights; friends were made and lost in a few hours; eternity was visioned and compassed in

a minute. The last words Jerry Donoghue of Ward 7-A had said before he went west came back to Sheila with a curious persistence.

"When all's said and done, miss, it's been a grand life--Brave lads for comrades--a lass who kept faith to the end--a good fight an' somethin' good to fight for--Near five years of it--wi' perdition grinnin' ye in the face an' the Holy Mother walkin' at your back--Sure, I might ha' lived fifty year in Letterkenny an' never tasted life half so plentiful--or--so--sweet."

That was the strange part of it; they had all found life "plentiful an' sweet"--nurses, surgeons, soldiers alike. They might be homesick, worn out with the business of fighting and patching up afterward, eternally aching in body and heart with the long stretches of horror and work with little sleep and less food, and yet not a handful out of every thousand of them would have chosen to quit if they could.

But when the quitting-time came, when war was over, what was going to happen then? Sheila wondered it about the boys who lay unconscious on their stretchers, packed in the room about her. She wondered it about the boys conscious in their cots below. Most of all she wondered it about Ward 7-A. It was going to hurt so many to have to look beyond the immediate day into a procession of numberless days stretching into years and years. The sudden relaxing from big efforts to little ones, that would hurt, too, like the uncramping of over-strained muscles. And the being thrown back on oneself to think, to act, to feel for oneself again--what of that? It was like dismembering a gigantic machine and scattering the infinitesimal parts of it broadcast over the earth to function alone. Only many of the parts would be imperfect, and all would have souls to reckon with.

But of the puzzle of it one fact stood out grippingly vital to Sheila. No soul must be thrown out of the melting-pot back into the old accustomed order of life and be left to feel unfit or unnecessary. There must be a big, compelling place for every man who came home. Of all the tragedies of war, she could conceive no greater one than to have these men who had put no limit to the price they were willing to pay to make the world safe for democracy sent back useless, to mark time to eternity.

But who was going to keep this from happening? How were the thousands of mutilØs to be made free of the burden of dependence and toleration? Who was going to guard them against atrophy of spirit? The nurse gathered up the last of the instruments and threw them in the sterilizer. As she took off her apron and wiped the beads of sweat from her face, her chief eyed her suspiciously.

"Get your coffee before you touch those dressings in 7-A. Understand? When did you have your clothes off last?" He growled like a good-natured but spent old dog.

The girl gave her uniform a disgusted look. "Pretty bad, isn't it? I put it on four--no, five days ago, but I've had my shoes off twice." She laid an impulsive hand on the chief's arm. "Promise about the coffee if you'll promise to do the dressings with me instead of Captain Griggs. He calls them the 'down-and-outers.' I can't quite stand for that."

"Well, what would you call 'em?"

"The invincibles," she declared. "Wouldn't you?"

But for all her promise, Sheila O'Leary did not get past the door of 7-A without putting in her head and calling out a "good morning." Whereupon twelve Irish tongues, dripping almost as many brogues, flung it back at her with a vengeance.

There were thirteen of them, all told, the remnants of a company of Royal Irish that had crossed the Scheldt with Haig. As Larry Shea had put it on the day of their arrival, they "made as grand leavin's as one could expect under the circumstances." The ambulances that had brought them, along with the additional seven who had gone west, had pivoted wrong at one of the crossroads, so that the American Military Hospital No. 10 had fallen heir to them instead of the B. H. T. It is recorded that even the chief showed consternation when he looked them over, and Larry, catching the look and being the only man conscious at the time, snorted indignantly:

"Well, sir, if ye think we're a mess, ye should have seen the Fritzies we left behind. Furninst them we're an ordther of perfectly decent lads." And Larry had crumpled up into a grinning unconsciousness.

It was Larry who led the singing; it was Larry now who, with an eye on the one silent figure in the ward and another on the nurse in the doorway, threw a wheedling remark to hold her with them a moment "by way of heartenment to Jamie." "Wait a bit, miss. Patsy MacLean was just askin' were ye a good hand at layin' a ghost?"

Before Sheila could answer, Harrigan, an Irish-American orderly, stepped over the threshold and shook a fist at 7-A.

"Aw, cut it out. The way this bunch works Miss O'Leary makes me sick. Don't cher know she hasn't been off duty for twenty-four hours? Let her go, can't cher?"

Johnnie O'Neil, from the far end of the room, smiled the smile of a cherub. "An' don't ye know, laddie, that it's always the saints in heaven that has the worst sinners on their hands? 'Tis jealous ye are, not being wicked enough to get a bit more of her attention yerself."

Sheila smiled impartially at them both, and with a parting promise of dressings to come she hurried off. Ward 7-A settled itself to wait for the worst and the best that the day had to offer. The room was a very small one, and the thirteen cots barely crowded into it, with space at the foot for Jamie O'Hara's wheel-chair to go the length and turn. They had been kept together by Sheila's urgent plea that they should be given a ward to themselves instead of scattering them through the larger wards, and it is doubtful if in all the war a more quietly merciful act had been executed. Not one of the thirteen but would have scorned to show any sign of dependence on the others, yet intuitively the girl had guessed what they would be able to give one another in the matter of spiritual succor. The way they continually hectored and teased, matched wits and good humor, as they had matched strength and daring in the old fighting-days before the hospital, was meat and drink to the souls struggling for dominance over mutilated bodies. United, they were men; separated--Sheila had often shuddered to think what pitiful, pain-tortured beings they might have been.

When she returned to the ward the chief was with her, and their combined arrival brought forth a prolonged, fortissimoed wail shammed forth in good Gaelic fashion. Larry's great hairy arm shot out, and a vindictive forefinger was wagged in the direction of the third cot.

"Ye'd best begin with Patsy MacLean this day. He hasn't been laid out first in a fortnight."

The others, taking the words from Larry's tongue, chorused, "Aye, begin wi' Patsy, the devil take him!"

"Why the devil? Wouldn't Fritzie do as well?" The chief smiled indulgently upon them all.

"'Tis a case for the devil, this time. Tell the colonel what you were putting over us last night," Michael Kenney, lance-corporal, growled through an undercurrent of chuckle.

Patrick MacLean, the color-sergeant, grinned as he reached out a welcoming hand to both surgeon and nurse. He was a prime favorite with them, as with his own lads. When pain wrestled for the upper hand, when things went wrong, moods turned black, or nights stretched interminably long and unendurable, Patsy could always turn the trick and produce something so absorbingly interesting or ridiculous that the pain and the long nights were forgotten. How well Sheila remembered that first time they had dressed his wounds! The muscles had stood out on his arms like whipcords; sweat poured down his face. He fainted twice, each time coming round to drawl out his story in that unforgetable Irish way:

"We were dthrivin' them afore us like sheep, all so tame an' sociable I

was forgettin' where I was. Somehow the notion took me I was back on the moorlan' drivin' the flocks for my father, when a Fritzie overhead drops a bomb on our captain.... It spatters the mud in my eyes somethin' terrible, an' when I rubs them clean again the machine-guns were cacklin' all round us like a parcel o' hens layin' eggs; we'd stumbled on a nest of them. Holy Pether, I was mad! I was for stickin' the colors in the muzzle o' one o' their bloody guns, an' I sings out as I rush 'em, 'Erin go bragh!' Then down I goes. Culmullen, there, comes staggerin' up. 'Take the colors,' says I. 'I've got no legs to carry 'em on.' 'I can't,' says he; 'I've got no arms to shoulder 'em.'... A bit aftherwards I sees Jamie--he's second in command--come runnin' up wild, but his arms an' legs is still in pairs, so I shouts afore things go black, 'The colors, Jamie, ye take the colors.' 'Wish to God, Patsy, I could,' says he, 'but I can't see.'... Faith, weren't we a healthy lot, miss? An' we the Royal Irish!" He had grinned then as he was grinning now.

Culmullen in the next cot, a schoolmaster from Ballygowan, raised his head. "Miss O'Leary, Patsy's the worst liar in Ulster. Ye might keep that in mind whenever he has anything to tell. If I had had the schooling of ye, I'd have thrashed the thruth into ye, ye rascal! Will ye kindly lean over and brush the hair out of my eyes, and if ye tickle my nose this time, I'll have Larry thrash ye for me the instant he's up."

The color-sergeant pulled himself over and gently brushed back the straggling hair. "Such a purty lad!" he murmured, sarcastically. "What's an arm or two so long's the Fritzies didn't ruin one o' them handsome features--nor shorten the length o' your tongue."

"What is it this time, Sergeant?" Sheila spoke coaxingly as she bent to the dressings.

"Well, ye know I've said from the beginnin' 'twas no ways natural havin' them legs o' mine twistin' an' achin' same as if they were still hangin' onto me. I leave it to both of yez. If they'd been anyways decent legs an' considerate o' the kindness I've always shown them, wouldn't they have quit pestherin' me when they took Dutch leave?"

"Stop moralizin'," shouted Johnnie O'Neil, the piper from Antrim. "Get down to the p'int o' your tale."

"It hasn't any point: it's flat," growled the lance-corporal.

Unembarrassed, Patsy MacLean went on: "I was a-thinkin' this all over again last night, a-listenin' to the ambulances comin' in, when a breath o' wind pushes the door open a bit, an' in walks, as natural as life, the ghost o' them two legs. 'Tis the gospel truth I'm tellin' ye. They walked a bit bowlegged, same as they always did, straight through the door an' down the ward. An' the queer thing is they never stopped by Larry's cot or

Casey Ryan's--the heathen!--but came right on to me."

"Faith, they wouldn't have had the nerve to stop. The leg Casey lost was as straight as a hazel wand, same as mine." Larry snorted contemptuously.

"The two of yez are jealous." Patsy lowered his voice to a mock whisper and confided to the chief and Sheila, "They know they'll have to be buyin' a good pair o' shoes an' throwin' the odd away, while I'll be sayin' enough from the shoes I'll never have to be buyin' to keep mysel' in cigars for the rest o' my life."

"But Patsy's wondtherin' can ye lay the ghost, miss?" Timothy Brennan, who had lost the "cream of his face," repeated the question Larry had asked a half-hour before. The rest of the ward tittered expectantly.

"Let me see--" The Irish blood in her steadied the nurse's hands, while she drew her lips into quizzical solemnity and winked at Culmullen over her shoulder. "I always thought it was restlessness that sent ghosts walking. Maybe these have come back, looking for their boots."

The titter broke into a roar of delight. "Thrue for ye!" shouted Parley-voo Flynn, pounding the arm of Jamie's chair with his one fist. "All ye've got to do, Patsy, is to be puttin' your boots beside your chair onct more, an' them legs will scrooch comfortably into them an' never haunt ye again. The lass is right, isn't she, Jamie?"

Eleven pairs of eyes and an odd one shifted apprehensively from the lad who was being dressed to the lad in the wheel-chair, and the eyes all showed varying degrees of trouble, uncertainty, and sorrow. They had a way of searching Jamie out in this fashion many times a day, while he sat very still, with eyes bandaged and lips that never flinched but never broke to a smile.

Larry shook a hairy fist at Parley-voo and answered the question himself:

"Of course she's right! Isn't she always? An' who but a heathen would be doubtin' the manners of a ghost?"

"Aye, but where will I be gettin' the boots?" Patsy made a sour grimace. "Me own purty ones had Christian burial somewhere back in that tremendous mud-puddle. Would any gentleman, now, still havin' two good legs, give me the loan of his boots for one night? Size eleven, if I don't disremember."

"That's Teig's number. Lend him yours, Teig, like a good lad, or we'll never be rid o' them ghosts." Mat O'Shaughnessy, at the other end of the line, fairly shook with the depth of his wail.

Teig Magee chuckled. He had lost an inch or so of back and was waiting the

glad day when they could mend it with an inch or so of shin-bone; in the mean time he was paralyzed. "Say, Docthor, would ye mind reachin' undther my pillow an' fetchin' them out for me? The lads have a way of forgettin' my hands are temporarily engaged. Thank ye. Ye can have them, Patsy, but ye'll have to go bail your ghosts won't up an' thramp off wi' them entirely."

It ended by the schoolmaster giving security--a half-crown with a bullet hole through it. Sheila was appointed custodian, and the boots were placed beside the color-sergeant's cot "against the comin' night."

As the chief and Sheila passed on from cot to cot, the spirits of Ward 7-A never wavered. Johnnie, who had piped the lads into battle and out for four years, and who daily rejoiced over the fact that Fritzie had shown the good sense to take a foot instead of a hand, told them that he was in rare luck now, for there would be time to make wee Johnnie at home the grandest piper in all of Ireland--an honor he could never have promised himself before.

There was "Bertha" Milliken, named for the big gun he had put out of commission and the gun crew he had captured. He had been given the V. C. for that. His pet joke was telling how the Fritzies grudged him its possession by shooting it away on the Scheldt along with a good bit that was under it. The nurse and surgeon handled "Bertha" very carefully; there was no knowing just what was going to happen to him. Casey Ryan had lost the odd of 'most everything the Lord had started him with, as he put it. An eye, an ear, a lung, and a leg were gone, and he was beating all the others at getting well. Mat O'Shaughnessy had it in the "vital." He was continuously boasting that it was the handiest place of all, and if it didn't get him he'd be the only perfect specimen invalided home.

"Parley-voo," the only one of them who essayed French, had wounds many but inconspicuous. He was given to counting a hypothetical fortune that might be his if the Empire would give him a shilling for every time he had been hit. Joseph Daly and "Gospel" Smith, the one Methodist, carried head wounds, while "Granny" Sullivan, the oldest, wisest, and most comforting of the company, had one smashed hip and a hole through the other, "the devil of a combination." Never had the atmosphere of 7-A been keener or spicier. Jamie alone sat still and silent.

Jamie was the last to be dressed, and because there was little to do the chief slipped away and left him to Sheila. As the nurse passed from Mat's cot to the wheel-chair, eleven pairs of eyes and an odd one followed her. A hush fell suddenly on the ward. The lads never intended this should happen, but somehow, at the same time everyday, the silence gripped them, and they seemed powerless to stay it. It was "Granny" Sullivan who first threw it off.

"'Tis a grand day outside, Jamie. Maybe ye're feeling the sun, now, comin' through the window?"

The nurse had lifted the bandage from the eyes. There was nothing there but empty sockets, almost healed. One could hear the quick intake of breath from the watching twelve, while every face registered an agony it had scorned to show for its own disablement. But for Jamie, "the singing lad from Derry" as they lovingly called him, it was different. They could face their own conditions with amazing jocularity, but they writhed daily under the torment of Jamie's. They could brave it no better than could he. For to put eternal darkness on the lad who loved the light, who would sit spellbound before the play of colors in the east at dawn or the flash of moonlight across troubled water, who could make a song out of the smile of a child or the rhythm of flying birds in the sky, that was damnable. An arch-fiend might have conceived it, but where was God to let it happen? A crippled Jamie without an arm or a leg was endurable--that cried out for no blasphemy--but a Jamie without eyes--God in heaven, how could it be!

The face of the singing lad was the face of a dreamer, as exquisite as a piece of marble that might have been fashioned by Praxiteles for a sun god. Since the battle on the Scheldt it had become a white mask, shorn of all dreams. Almost it might have been a death-mask for the soul of Jamie O'Hara. It showed no response now when "Granny" spoke; only the lad's hands fluttered a moment toward the window, then dropped heavily back into his lap.

"Aye, maybe I feel it." The voice was colorless and tired. "I can't be remembering clear sunlight any more. The last days of the fighting, smoke was too thick in the sky, or the rains fell."

Eleven pairs of eyes and one odd one cast about for some inspiration. "Sure, think o' somethin' pleasanter nor cannon smoke an' rain. Think o'--" "Granny" floundered for a moment, then gave up in despair.

"That's all I see when I look up. When I look down, it's worse--an everlasting earth, covered with mud and dying men!" Jamie shivered.

Larry struggled out of his torment. "I say, Jamie, don't ye mind the song ye were makin' for us the day we fell back from Cambrai? 'Twas an Irish one, full o' the sun an' the singin' birds of Donegal. Wi' the Fritzies risin' like a murdtherous tide behind us, 'twas all that kept the heart in us that day. Ye say it for Miss O'Leary. Sure, ye've never said a song for her yet."

Jamie shook his head. "I'm sorry, lad; I've lost it. I was making so many songs those days--ye couldn't be expecting a body to carry them all about in his head. Now could ye?" The lips tried bravely to smile, and failed again.

But Larry grinned triumphantly. "Sure 'Granny' has it wrote down. He showed it to me once. Fetch it, 'Granny,' an' let Jamie be re--" He broke off, aghast; the lads about him were staring in absolute horror. Only the singing lad showed nothing. He might not have heard, or, hearing, the words were meaningless.

So Sheila took matters into her own hands. She covered the eyes with fresh gauze, wrapped Jamie up, and bundled him out in his chair to Harrigan with the remark that the day was too fine to miss and there was more of it outside the hospital than in. She watched until she had seen Harrigan take him to a sunny, wind-sheltered corner of the gardens, and then she came back to 7-A. She was thinking of Peter Brooks, her man at the front, and she was trying to fathom with all her heart what manner of healing she would give had Peter come back to her as Jamie O'Hara had come. She closed the door of the ward behind her and faced the twelve.

"Lads, what are we going to do for Jamie?"

Larry groaned out loud. It was the first luxury of expression he had indulged in since Jamie had been wheeled out. "Aye, what are we goin' to do? That's what every man of us has been askin' himself since--since he knew."

"We act like a crowd o' half-wits, a-thryin' to boost his spirits a bit, an' all the time he grows whiter an' quieter." Patsy turned his head away; his lips were twitching.

"Aye, that's God's truth." "Bertha's" hoarse croak was heavy with despair. "Ye can see for yourself, miss, it's noways nat'ral for Jamie--that's the worst of it. It's been Jamie, just, that always put heart back in us when things went blackest. Wasn't it him that made it easy goin' for them that went west? Can one of us mind the time he wasn't ready with a song to fetch us over the top, or through the mud--or straight to death, if them was the orders? No matter how loud the guns screeched, we could always hear Jamie above them."

"We could hear him when we couldn't have heard another sound," Culmullen mumbled.

"Gospel" Smith raised a bandaged head and leveled piercing eyes at Sheila. "You know what the Gospel says about the stars singing in the morning--all together like? Well, Jamie was the lad who could outsing them. You know how it feels at that gray, creepy hour o' dawn, when a man's heart jumps to his throat and sticks there, and his hands shake like a girl's? Often's the time we'd be waiting orders to attack just like that. The stars might have shouted themselves clear o' the sky, for all the good they'd have done us; but Jamie was different. He'd make us a couplet or a verse to

sing low under our breath, something you could put your teeth into. And when the orders came our hearts were always back where the Lord had put them."

"Granny" Sullivan plucked nervously at his blanket. "An' now, when we want to hearten him, we're hurtin' instead. Seems as if the devil took hold of our tongues an' spilled the wrong words off."

"Shall I tell you what I would try to do, if I were one of you Irish lads who had fought with him?" Sheila's face was as drawn as any of the twelve.

"In God's name tell us!" Johnnie, the piper, spoke as reverently as if he were at mass.

"You heard what he said just now about seeing nothing but mud and dying men? Well, that's the trouble. He can't see any longer things he loves, the things he has always carried in his heart. All the beautiful memories have been lost, and all he has left are the horrors of those last days. He's got nothing left to make into songs any more. Don't you see? You've got to bring that back to him, that power to see--here." The girl's hand pressed her heart.

"Aye, but how?" Patsy asked it breathlessly.

"Bring him back his memories--memories of Ireland, of the things he loved best to sing about. You have eyes; make him see."

A hush fell on Ward 7-A. Then Timothy Brennan muttered as a man alone: "'Tis the words of a woman. God's blessin' on her!"

All through the day there rang through Sheila's ears the last words Jamie had said to her that morning. He had turned his face back, as Harrigan had wheeled him away, to answer her "All right, Jamie?" with "As right as ever I'll be. Do ye know, the O'Haras are famous for their long living? My grandfather lived to be ninety-eight, and his father to be over a hundred. That leaves me seventy-five years, maybe. Seventy-five years! And already I'm fearin' the length of a day." She was still hearing them when she came back to the ward at day's end to find Jamie in his old accustomed place by the window. His face was as masklike as ever, and Larry was talking:

"Sure, I mind often an' often how the neighbors used to tell me if I'd lie asleep with my ear to a fairy rath I'd be hearin' their music an' seein' their dancin'. But I never did. But I saw a sight as grand, the flight o' the skylark at ring-o'-day. Many's the time I've seen them leave the marsh an' go liltin' into the blue."

"And the lilting!" Culmullen closed his eyes the better to recall it. "I mind the last time I heard one. The sky was turned orange, and the lough

turned gold. The marsh was glistening with mist, and out of the reeds where her nest was she flew. It was like a feathered bundle of song thrown skyward."

"Aye, what a song!" Johnnie, the piper, spoke with ecstasy. "Hark! I can make it." He puckered his lips, and through them came the sweet, lilting notes of the lark's matin song.

"Make it again." Jamie was leaning forward in his chair, his hands gripping the arms.

Again the piper whistled it through, and then again and again. A smile brushed Jamie's lips, and the others, watching, breathless, saw.

"What is it?" asked "Granny," softly.

"Naught. Only for the moment I was thinking I could be smelling the dew on the bogs, yonder. Can ye pipe for the blackbirds, Johnnie?"

And Johnnie piped.

So a new order of things was established in Ward 7-A, and as heretofore the lads had vied in witty derision of their calamities they vied now with one another in telling tales of Ireland. Each marshaled forth his dearest, greenest memory, clothed in its best, to fill the ears and heart of Jamie O'Hara. Sometimes he smiled, and then there was a great, silent rejoicing among the twelve; sometimes he asked for more, and then tongues tripped over one another in mad effort to furnish forth a memory more wonderful than all that had gone before. But more often he sat still and white, as if he heard nothing. And in the midst of it all, as the lads drew each day nearer to health, Sheila noted a new uneasiness among them. It was Larry who spoke the trouble while the nurse was doing his dressings. He whispered it, so the others should not hear.

"By rights we don't belong here. Well, they'll be movin' us soon as we're mended, won't they?"

The nurse nodded.

"Invalided home. Ye know what that means?"

Again the nurse nodded.

"Mind ye, there's been never a word dropped atween us, but we're all fearin' it like--" Larry rubbed his sleeve over his mouth twice before he went on. "While we've got Jamie to think about, we can manage, but when he's packed off somewheres--to learn readin' an' writin' for the blind--an' we're scattered to the four winds o' Ireland, we'll be

realizin' for the first time what we are, just. Then what are we goin' to do? I ask ye it honest, miss."

And honestly Sheila answered, "I don't know."

A day later "Granny" whispered over his dressings: "Faith there's a shadow creeping over the sill. Can't ye be feeling it?" And the color-sergeant's spirits failed to rise that day at all.

Yet for all their fears the inevitable day came upon them unawares and caught them, as you might say, red-handed. Sheila had stolen a half-hour from rest and was sitting with them, listening to Casey Ryan, the Galway lad, tell of the fishing in Kilkieran Bay.

Larry took the words out of his mouth. "'Twill be the proud day for us all when we cast our eyes on Irish wather again, whether 'tis in Dublin Bay or off the Skerries."

"Aye, and smelling the thorn bloom and hearing the throstles sing!" "Granny's" rejoicing followed on the heels of Larry's, while he shook his fist at him in warning.

Larry threw a helpless look at Jamie and sank back on his pillow, while Patsy roared his ultimatum: "I'd a deal sight rather hear a throstle sing than see all the bloody wather in the world. Larry's fair mad about wather ever since he went dirty for a fortnight at Vimy."

"Sure, the thing I'm most wantin'," croaked "Bertha," "is to hear the wind in the heather again, deep o' the night. There isn't a sweeter sound than that, so soft an' croony-like."

"Yes, an' I'll be wantin' to hear the old cracked voice o' Biddy Donoghue callin' cockles at the Antrim fair. Faith, she's worth thravelin' far to be hearin'. An' think o' gettin' your tooth on a live cockle!" Johnnie moistened his lips in anticipation as he broke forth in a falsetto:

"Cockles--good cockles--here's some for your dad,
An' some for your lassie--an' more for your lad."

Amid the appreciative chuckle of the listeners, the door of Ward 7-A opened and the chief stood on the threshold. He smiled as a man may when he has a hurting thing to do and grudges the doing of it. He saluted the remnants of Company--of the Royal Irish:

"Orders, lads. You'll be leaving to-morrow for--Blighty."

There was nothing but silence, a silence of agony and apprehension, until Patsy whispered, "Leavin' _together_, sir?"

"I--hope so."

"Thravelin'--the same?" It was Timothy Brennan this time.

"I don't know."

"Will we be afther makin' the same hospital yondther--do ye think?" It took all Larry's fighting soul to keep his voice steady.

"I--It isn't likely."

"Thank ye, sir."

That was all. The chief left, and Sheila sat on in the stillness of Ward 7-A, wondering wherein lay the value of theories when in the face of the first crucial need one sat stunned and helpless. The mask of good spirits had dropped from the lads like a camouflaged screen; behind it showed the naked, bleeding souls of twelve terror-stricken men. For Jamie's mask was still upon him. If the orders had brought any added misery to him, no one could have told.

As Sheila looked into their faces and saw all that was written there, she gripped her hands behind her and tried to tell them what she had thought out so clearly in the operating-room days and days before. But the message she had thought was hers to give had somehow become meaningless. What guarantee had she to make that their lives would go on being vital, necessary to the big scheme of humanity? How could she promise that out of their share in the war and the price they had paid would be wrought something so fine, so strong and eternal, that the years ahead must needs hold plenty for their hearts and souls? She could not get beyond the realization that it was all only theory, the theory of one glowingly healthy mind in a sound body. If such a promise could be given at all, it must not come from such as she; if it was to bear faith, it must be spoken by one who had gone through the crucible as they had gone through--and come out even as they had come.

She looked at Jamie. If Jamie had only had eyes to catch the meaning of the thing she was trying to say! If he who had sung courage into their hearts in the old days could sing it once again! A message from Jamie would bring it home.

But there was nothing in that blank, white face Sheila could reach. He seemed as he had seemed from the beginning, a soul apart, so wrapped in its own despair that no human cry of need could shake it free. In desperation she looked at Larry. His eyes were closed; his face had gone almost as white as Jamie's. Patsy was gazing at the ceiling; the veins on his arms stood out as they had on that first day when he had fainted twice

from the pain of his dressing. Down the line of cots the nurse's eyes traveled, and back again. Every lad was past speaking for another; each lay transfixed with his own personal fear.

The minutes seemed intolerable. The silence grew heavy with so much muffling of despair. Sheila found herself praying that the men would groan, cry out, curse, anything to break the ghastly hush. Then suddenly "Bertha" propped himself as best he could on an elbow and croaked: "For the love of Mary, miss, can't ye cram us with morphine the night? 'Twould save the British Empire a few shillin's' expense and them at home a deal o' misery."

And the color-sergeant choked out, "Aye, in God's mercy send us west, along wi' them lucky seven that has gone already!"

Without knowing why she did it, Sheila reached over and gripped one of Jamie's hands. "Help, can't you?" she whispered. The late afternoon sun was shining through the window back of him. The glory of it was full on his face, so that every lad in the ward saw plainly the smile that crept into the lips, a tender, whimsical smile that belonged to the Jamie of old. And the deep, vibrating voice was the voice of the Jamie of fighting days.

"Patsy, ye rascal! I'm thinking it was like yourself to come breaking into the first song I've had on my lips in a month. You've nearly ruined it for me, lad."

Amazement, incredulity, thanksgiving swept over the faces like puffs of wind over young wheat. Unnoticed, Sheila turned to the window and wept a scattering of tears that could no longer be held back. Jamie pulled himself out of the wheel-chair and found his way down the space at the foot of the cots to the door. He was very straight, and his head was high.

"Just a minute, lads." He dug his hands deep into his pockets. "Before I give ye the song I've made for ye, there's something I have to be saying first. Miss O'Leary was right when she said a man has more than one pair of eyes to see with. He can see grand with his heart--if he's shown the way. That's what I have to thank ye for this day, the wiping of my memory clean of those last days, and the showing me how to see anew. Ye've given Ireland back to me with her lark songs, her blue, dancing water, her wind-brushed heather like a purple sea. Ye've made the world beautiful for me again, and ye've given me the heart to sing."

He stopped a minute and smiled again. "I was thinking all this when the chief came in, and after that I was so busy with the song that sprang into my mind that I came near forgetting the lot o' ye. If that rascal Patsy hadn't interrupted me, faith, I might have made the song longer."

Sheila turned back from the window. There was a grin on the face of every lad, and on the face of Jamie was the look of a man who had found his dreams again. The song being new to his tongue, he gave it slowly:

"They say the earth's a bit shot up--well, we can say the same,
But, praise to every lad that's fought, the scars they show no shame.
And for those who have prayed for us--why, here's an end to tears.
Sure, God can do much healing in the next handful of years.

"So, Johnnie, set your chanter and blow your pipes full strong,
And, Larry, raise your voice again and lead our marching song.
Let Mac unfurl the colors--till they sweep yon crimson west,
For we're still the Royal Irish, a-fighting with the best."

And that is precisely the way they went when they left the American Military Hospital No. 10 the next morning. The color-sergeant led. Jamie walked beside the stretcher to give a hand with the staff. Johnnie sat bolt upright, bolstered with many pillows, to enable him to get a firm grip on the pipes, and he skirled the "Shule Aroon" as he had never skirled before. Larry's voice again boomed in the lead, and every man in the hospital that had breath to spare cheered them as they passed. And for every one who saw or heard the going of the Royal Irish, that day, was left behind a memory green enough to last till the end of time.

Valley Song.
by Carl Sandburg
from *The Second Book of Modern Verse*, Ed. Jessie B. Rittenhouse
Etext #1166

Your eyes and the valley are memories.
Your eyes fire and the valley a bowl.
It was here a moonrise crept over the timberline.
It was here we turned the coffee cups upside down.
And your eyes and the moon swept the valley.

I will see you again to-morrow.
I will see you again in a million years.
I will never know your dark eyes again.
These are three ghosts I keep.
These are three sumach-red dogs I run with.

All of it wraps and knots to a riddle:
I have the moon, the timberline, and you.
All three are gone -- and I keep all three.

THE STORY OF JUBAL WHO HAD NO "I"

from *In Midsummer Days and Other Tales*, by August Strindberg
Translator: Ellie Schleussner Project Gutenberg Ebook #6694

Once upon a time there was a king whose name was John Lackland, and it is not difficult to imagine the reason why.

But another time there lived a great singer who was called "Jubal, who had no I," and I am now going to tell you the reason.

The name which he had inherited from his father, a soldier, was Peal, and undeniably there was music in the name. But nature had also given him a strong will, which stiffened his back like an iron bar, and that is a splendid gift, quite invaluable in the struggle for an existence. When he was still a baby, only just able to stammer a few words, he would never refer to his own little person as "he," as other babies do, but from the very first he spoke of himself as "I." You have no "I," said his parents. When he grew older, he expressed every little want or desire by "I will." But then his father said to him, "You have no will," and "Your will grows in the wood."

It was very foolish of the soldier, but he knew no better; he had learned to will only what he was ordered to do.

Young Peal thought it strange that he should be supposed to have no will when he had such a very strong one, but he let it pass.

When he had grown into a fine, strong youth, his father said to him one day, "What trade will you learn?"

The boy did not know; he had ceased to will anything, because he was forbidden to do so. It is true, he had a leaning towards music, but he did not dare to say so, for he was convinced that his parents would not allow him to become a musician. Therefore, being an obedient son, he replied, "I don't will anything."

"Then you shall be a tapster," said the father.

Whether it was because the father knew a tapster, or because wine had a peculiar attraction for him, is a matter of indifference. It is quite enough to know that young Peal was sent to the wine vaults, and he might have fared a good deal worse.

There was a lovely smell of sealing-wax and French wine in the cellars,

and they were large and had vaulted roofs, like churches. When he sat at the casks and tapped the red wine, his heart was filled with gladness, and he sang, in an undertone at first, all sorts of tunes which he had picked up.

His master, to whom wine spelt life, loved song and gaiety, and never dreamed of stopping his singing; it sounded so well in the vaults, and, moreover, it attracted customers, which was a splendid thing from the master's point of view.

One day a commercial traveller dropped in; he had started life as an opera-singer, and when he heard Peal, he was so delighted with him that he invited him to dinner.

They played nine-pins, ate crabs with dill, drank punch, and, above everything, sang songs. Between two songs, and after they had sworn eternal friendship, the commercial traveller said:

"Why don't you go on the stage?"

"I?" answered Peal, "how could I do that?"

"All you have to do is to say 'I will.'"

This was a new doctrine, for since his third year young Peal had not used the words "I" and "will." He had trained himself to neither wish nor will, and he begged his friend not to lead him into temptation.

But the commercial traveller came again; he came many times, and once he was accompanied by a famous singer; and one evening Peal, after much applause from a professor of singing, took his fate into his own hands.

He said good-bye to his master, and over a glass of wine heartily thanked his friend, the commercial traveller, for having given him self-confidence and will,--"will, that iron bar, which keeps a man's back erect and prevents him from grovelling on all fours." And he swore a solemn oath never to forget his friend, who had taught him to have faith in himself.

Then he went to say good-bye to his parents.

"I will be a singer," he said in a loud voice, which echoed through the room.

The father glanced at the horse-whip, and the mother cried; but it was no use.

"Don't lose yourself, my darling boy," were the mother's last words.

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Young Peal managed to raise enough money to enable him to go abroad. There he learned singing according to all the rules of the art, and in a few years' time he was a very great singer indeed. He earned much money and travelled with his own impresario.

Peal was prospering now and found no difficulty in saying "I will," or even "I command." His "I" grew to gigantic proportions, and he suffered no other "I's" near him. He denied himself nothing, and did not put his light under a bushel. But now, as he was about to return to his own country, his impresario told him that no man could be a great singer and at the same time be called Peal; he advised him to adopt a more elegant name, a foreign name by preference, for that was the fashion.

The great man fought an inward struggle, for it is not a very nice thing to change one's name; it looks as if one were ashamed of one's father and mother, and is apt to create a bad impression.

But hearing that it was the fashion, he let it pass.

He opened his Bible to look for a name, for the Bible is the very best book for the purpose.

And when he came to Jubal, "who was the son of Lamech, and the father of all such as handle the harp and organ," he considered that he could not do better. The impresario, who was an Englishman, suggested that he should call himself Mr. Jubal, and Peal agreed. Henceforth he was Mr. Jubal.

It was all quite harmless, of course, since it was the fashion, but it was nevertheless a strange thing with the new name Peal had changed his nature. His past was blotted out. Mr. Jubal looked upon himself as an Englishman born and bred, spoke with a foreign accent, grew side-whiskers and wore very high collars; a checked suit grew round him as the bark grows round a tree, apparently without any effort on his part. He carried himself stiffly, and when he met a friend in the street he acknowledged his friendly bow with the flicker of an eyelid. He never turned round if anybody called after him, and he always stood right in the middle of a street car.

He hardly knew himself.

He was now at home again, in his own country, and engaged to sing at the Opera-house. He played kings and prophets, heroes and demons, and he was so good an actor that whenever he rehearsed a part, he instantly became the part he impersonated.

One day he was strolling along the street. He was playing some sort of a demon, but he was also Mr. Jubal. Suddenly he heard a voice calling after him, "Peal!" He did not turn round, for no Englishman would do such a thing, and, moreover, his name was no longer Peal.

But the voice called again, "Peal!" and his friend, the commercial traveller, stood before him, looking at him searchingly, and yet with an expression of shy kindliness.

"Dear old Peal, it _is_ you!" he said.

Mr. Jubal felt that a demon was taking possession of him; he opened his mouth so wide that he showed all his teeth, and bellowed a curt "No!"

Then his friend felt quite convinced that it was he and went away. He was an enlightened man, who knew men, the world and himself inside out, and therefore he was neither sorry nor astonished.

But Mr. Jubal thought he was; he heard a voice within him saying, "Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice," and he did what St. Peter had done, he went away and wept bitterly. That is to say, he wept in imagination, but the demon in his heart laughed.

Henceforth he was always laughing; he laughed at good and evil, sorrow and disgrace, at everything and everybody.

His father and mother knew, from the papers, who Mr. Jubal really was, but they never went to the Opera-house, for they fancied it had something to do with hoops and horses, and they objected to seeing their son in such surroundings.

Mr. Jubal was now the greatest living singer; he had lost a lot of his "I," but he still had his will.

Then his day came. There was a little ballet-dancer who could bewitch men, and she bewitched Jubal. She bewitched him to such an extent that he asked her whether he might be hers. (He meant, of course, whether she would be his, but the other is a more polite way of expressing it.)

"You shall be mine," said the sorceress, "if I may take you."

"You may do anything you like," replied Jubal.

The girl took him at his word and they married. First of all he taught her to sing and play, and then he gave her everything she asked for. But since was a sorceress, she always wanted the things which he most objected to giving to her, and so, gradually, she wrested his will from

him and made him her slave.

One fine day Mrs. Jubal had become a great singer, so great that when the audience called "Jubal!" it was not Mr. but Mrs. Jubal who took the call.

Jubal, of course, longed to regain his former position, but he scorned to do it at his wife's expense.

The world began to forget him.

The brilliant circle of friends who had surrounded Mr. Jubal in his bachelor chambers now surrounded his wife, for it was she who was "Jubal."

Nobody wanted to talk to him or drink with him, and when he attempted to join in the conversation, nobody listened to his remarks; it was just as if he were not present, and his wife was treated as if she were an unmarried woman.

Then Mr. Jubal grew very lonely, and in his loneliness he began to frequent the cafes.

One evening he was at a restaurant, trying to find somebody to talk to, and ready to talk to anybody willing to listen to him. All at once he caught sight of his old friend the commercial traveller, sitting at a table by himself, evidently very bored. "Thank goodness," he thought, "here's somebody to spend an hour with--it's old Lundberg."

He went to Mr. Lundberg's table and said "good evening." But no sooner had he done so than his friend's face changed in so extraordinary a manner that Jubal wondered whether he had made a mistake.

"Aren't you Lundberg?" he asked.

"Yes!"

"Don't you know me? I'm Jubal!"

"No!"

"Don't you know your old friend Peal?"

"Peal died a long time ago."

Then Jubal understood that he was, from a certain point of view, dead, and he went away.

On the following day he left the stage for ever and opened a school for singing, with the title of a professor.

Then he went to foreign countries, and remained abroad for many years.

Sadness, for he mourned for himself as for a dead friend, and sorrow were fast making an old man of him. But he was glad that it should be so, for, he thought, if I'm old, it won't last much longer. But as he did not age quite as fast as he would have liked, he bought himself a wig with long white curls. He felt better after that, for it disguised him completely, so completely that he did not know himself.

With long strides, his hands crossed on his back, he walked up and down the pavements, lost in a brown study; he seemed to be looking for some one, or expecting some one. If his eyes met the glance of other eyes, he did not respond to the question in them; if anybody tried to make his acquaintance, he would never talk of anything but things and objects. And he never said "I" or "I find," but always "it seems." He had lost himself, as he did one day just as he was going to shave. He was sitting before his looking-glass, his chin covered with a lather of soap; he raised the hand which held the razor and looked into the glass; then he beheld the room behind his back, but he could not see his face, and all at once he realised how matters stood. Now he was filled with a passionate yearning to find himself again. He had given the best part of himself to his wife, for she had his will, and so he decided to go and see her.

When he was back in his native country and walked through the streets in his white wig, not a soul recognised him. But a musician who had been in Italy, meeting him in town one day, said in a loud voice, "There goes a maestro!"

Immediately Jubal imagined that he was a great composer. He bought some music paper and started to write a score; that is to say, he wrote a number of long and short notes on the lines, some for the violins, of course, others for the wood-wind, and the remainder for the brass instruments. He sent his work to the Conservatoire. But nobody could play the music, because it was not music, but only notes.

A little later on he was met by an artist who had been in Paris. "There goes a model!" said the artist. Jubal heard it, and at once believed that he was a model, for he believed everything that was said of him, because he did not know who or what he was.

Presently he remembered his wife, and he resolved to go and see her. He did go, but she had married again, and she and her second husband, who was a baron, had gone abroad.

At last he grew tired of his quest, and, like all tired men, he felt a great yearning for his mother. He knew that she was a widow and lived in a cottage in the mountains, so one day he went to see her.

"Don't you know me?" he asked.

"What is your name?" asked the mother.

"My name is your son's name. Don't you know it?"

"My son's name was Peal, but yours is Jubal, and I don't know Jubal."

"You disown me?"

"As you disowned yourself and your mother."

"Why did you rob me of my will when I was a little child?"

"You gave your will to a woman."

"I had to, because it was the only way of winning her. But why did you tell me I had no will?"

"Well, your father told you that, my boy, and he knew no better; you must forgive him, for he is dead now. Children, you see, are not supposed to have a will of their own, but grown-up people are."

"How well you explain it all, mother! Children are not supposed to have a will, but grown-up people are."

"Now, listen to me, Gustav," said his mother, "Gustav Peal...."

These were his two real names, and when he heard them from her lips, he became himself again. All the parts he had played--kings and demons, the maestro and the model--cut and ran, and he was but the son of his mother.

He put his head on her knees and said, "Now, let me die here, for at last I am at home."

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE.

from *In The Seven Woods*, by William Butler (W.B.) Yeats
EBook #30652

Maeve the great queen was pacing to and fro,
Between the walls covered with beaten bronze,
In her high house at Cruachan; the long hearth,
Flickering with ash and hazel, but half showed
Where the tired horse-boys lay upon the rushes,
Or on the benches underneath the walls,
In comfortable sleep; all living slept
But that great queen, who more than half the night
Had paced from door to fire and fire to door.
Though now in her old age, in her young age
She had been beautiful in that old way
That's all but gone; for the proud heart is gone
And the fool heart of the counting-house fears all
But soft beauty and indolent desire.
She could have called over the rim of the world
Whatever woman's lover had hit her fancy,
And yet had been great bodied and great limbed,
Fashioned to be the mother of strong children;
And she'd had lucky eyes and a high heart,
And wisdom that caught fire like the dried flax,
At need, and made her beautiful and fierce,
Sudden and laughing.
O unquiet heart,
Why do you praise another, praising her,
As if there were no tale but your own tale
Worth knitting to a measure of sweet sound?
Have I not bid you tell of that great queen
Who has been buried some two thousand years?

When night was at its deepest, a wild goose
Cried from the porter's lodge, and with long clamour
Shook the ale horns and shields upon their hooks;
But the horse-boys slept on, as though some power
Had filled the house with Druid heaviness;
And wondering who of the many changing Sidhe
Had come as in the old times to counsel her,
Maeve walked, yet with slow footfall being old,
To that small chamber by the outer gate.
The porter slept although he sat upright
With still and stony limbs and open eyes.
Maeve waited, and when that ear-piercing noise

Broke from his parted lips and broke again,
She laid a hand on either of his shoulders,
And shook him wide awake, and bid him say
Who of the wandering many-changing ones
Had troubled his sleep. But all he had to say
Was that, the air being heavy and the dogs
More still than they had been for a good month,
He had fallen asleep, and, though he had dreamed nothing,
He could remember when he had had fine dreams.
It was before the time of the great war
Over the White-Horned Bull, and the Brown Bull.

She turned away; he turned again to sleep
That no god troubled now, and, wondering
What matters were afoot among the Sidhe,
Maeve walked through that great hall, and with a sigh
Lifted the curtain of her sleeping room,
Remembering that she too had seemed divine
To many thousand eyes, and to her own
One that the generations had long waited
That work too difficult for mortal hands
Might be accomplished. Bunching the curtain up
She saw her husband Ailell sleeping there,
And thought of days when he'd had a straight body,
And of that famous Fergus, Nessa's husband,
Who had been the lover of her middle life.

Suddenly Ailell spoke out of his sleep,
And not with his own voice or a man's voice,
But with the burning, live, unshaken voice
Of those that it may be can never age.
He said, 'High Queen of Cruachan and Mag Ai
A king of the Great Plain would speak with you.'
And with glad voice Maeve answered him, 'What King
Of the far wandering shadows has come to me?
As in the old days when they would come and go
About my threshold to counsel and to help.'
The parted lips replied, 'I seek your help,
For I am Aengus and I am crossed in love.'

'How may a mortal whose life gutters out
Help them that wander with hand clasping hand
By rivers where nor rain nor hail has dimmed
Their haughty images, that cannot fade
Although their beauty's like a hollow dream.'

'I come from the undimmed rivers to bid you call
The children of the Maines out of sleep,

And set them digging into Anbual's hill.
We shadows, while they uproot his earthy house,
Will overthrow his shadows and carry off
Caer, his blue eyed daughter that I love.
I helped your fathers when they built these walls
And I would have your help in my great need,
Queen of high Cruachan.'
'I obey your will
With speedy feet and a most thankful heart:
For you have been, O Aengus of the birds,
Our giver of good counsel and good luck.'
And with a groan, as if the mortal breath
Could but awaken sadly upon lips
That happier breath had moved, her husband turned
Face downward, tossing in a troubled sleep;
But Maeve, and not with a slow feeble foot,
Came to the threshold of the painted house,
Where her grandchildren slept, and cried aloud,
Until the pillared dark began to stir
With shouting and the clang of unhooked arms.

She told them of the many-changing ones;
And all that night, and all through the next day
To middle night, they dug into the hill.
At middle night great cats with silver claws,
Bodies of shadow and blind eyes like pearls,
Came up out of the hole, and red-eared hounds
With long white bodies came out of the air
Suddenly, and ran at them and harried them.

The Maines' children dropped their spades, and stood
With quaking joints and terror strucken faces,
Till Maeve called out, 'These are but common men.
The Maines' children have not dropped their spades
Because Earth crazy for its broken power
Casts up a show and the winds answer it
With holy shadows.' Her high heart was glad,
And when the uproar ran along the grass
She followed with light footfall in the midst,
Till it died out where an old thorn tree stood.

Friend of these many years, you too had stood
With equal courage in that whirling rout;
For you, although you've not her wandering heart,
Have all that greatness, and not hers alone.
For there is no high story about queens
In any ancient book but tells of you,
And when I've heard how they grew old and died

Or fell into unhappiness I've said;
'She will grow old and die and she has wept!'
And when I'd write it out anew, the words,
Half crazy with the thought, She too has wept!
Outrun the measure.
I'd tell of that great queen
Who stood amid a silence by the thorn
Until two lovers came out of the air
With bodies made out of soft fire. The one
About whose face birds wagged their fiery wings
Said, 'Aengus and his sweetheart give their thanks
To Maeve and to Maeve's household, owing all
In owing them the bride-bed that gives peace.'
Then Maeve, '0 Aengus, Master of all lovers,
A thousand years ago you held high talk
With the first kings of many pillared Cruachan.
0 when will you grow weary.'
They had vanished,
But out of the dark air over her head there came
A murmur of soft words and meeting lips.

MISS PRINCE OF DUNPORT

from *A Country Doctor and Selected Stories and Sketches*, by Sarah Orne Jewett EBook #15294

While all these years were passing, Miss Anna Prince the elder was living quietly in Dunport, and she had changed so little that her friends frequently complimented her upon such continued youthfulness. She had by no means forgotten the two greatest among the many losses and sorrows of her life, but the first sharp pain of them was long since over with. The lover from whom she had parted for the sake of a petty misunderstanding had married afterward and died early; but he had left a son of whom Miss Prince was very proud and fond; and she had given him the place in her heart which should have belonged to her own niece. When she thought of the other trial, she believed herself, still, more sinned against than sinning, and gave herself frequent assurances that it had been impossible to act otherwise at the time of her brother's death and his wife's strange behavior afterward. And she had persuaded her conscience to be quiet, until at last, with the ideal of a suspicious, uncongenial, disagreeable group of rustics in her mind, she thought it was well ordered by Heaven that she had been spared any closer intercourse.

Miss Prince was a proud and stately woman of the old New England type: more colonial than American perhaps, and quite provincial in her traditions and prejudices. She was highly respected in her native town, where she was a prominent figure in society. Nobody was more generous and kind or public spirited, as her friends often said, and young George Gerry was well-rewarded, though he gave her great pleasure by his evident affection and interest. He liked to pay frequent visits to his old friend, and to talk with her. She had been a very attractive girl long ago, and the best of her charms had not faded yet; the young man was always welcomed warmly, and had more than once been helped in his projects. His mother was a feeble woman, who took little interest in anything outside her own doors; and he liked himself better as he sat in Miss Prince's parlor than anywhere else. We are always fond of the society of our best selves, and though he was popular with the rest of his townspeople, he somehow could not help trying always to be especially agreeable to Miss Prince.

Although she was apparently free from regrets, and very well satisfied with life, even her best friends did not know how lonely her life had seemed to her, or how sadly hurt she had been by the shame and sorrow of her only brother's marriage. The thought of his child and of the impossibility of taking her to her heart and home had been like a nightmare at first, and yet Miss Prince lacked courage to break down the barriers, and to at least know the worst. She kept the two ideas of the actual niece and the ideal one whom she might have loved so

much distinct and separate in her mind, and was divided between a longing to see the girl and a fierce dread of her sudden appearance. She had forbidden any allusion to the subject years and years before, and so had prevented herself from hearing good news as well as bad; though she had always been careful that the small yearly remittance should be promptly sent, and was impatient to receive the formal acknowledgment of it, which she instantly took pains to destroy. She sometimes in these days thought about making her will; there was no hurry about it, but it would be only fair to provide for her nearest of kin, while she was always certain that she should not let all her money and the old house with its handsome furnishings go into such unworthy hands. It was a very hard question to settle, and she thought of it as little as possible, and was sure there was nothing to prevent her living a great many years yet. She loved her old home dearly, and was even proud of it, and had always taken great care of the details of its government. She never had been foolish enough to make away with her handsome mahogany furniture, and to replace it with cheaper and less comfortable chairs and tables, as many of her neighbors had done, and had taken an obstinate satisfaction all through the years when it seemed quite out of date, in insisting upon the polishing of the fine wood and the many brass handles, and of late she had been reaping a reward for her constancy. It had been a marvel to certain progressive people that a person of her comfortable estate should be willing to reflect that there was not a marble-topped table in her house, until it slowly dawned upon them at last that she was mistress of the finest house in town. Outwardly, it was painted white and stood close upon the street, with a few steep front steps coming abruptly down into the middle of the narrow sidewalk; its interior was spacious and very imposing, not only for the time it was built in the last century, but for any other time. Miss Prince's ancestors had belonged to some of the most distinguished among the colonial families, which fact she neither appeared to remember nor consented to forget; and, as often happened in the seaport towns of New England, there had been one or two men in every generation who had followed the sea. Her own father had been among the number, and the closets of the old house were well provided with rare china and fine old English crockery that would drive an enthusiastic collector to distraction. The carved woodwork of the railings and wainscotings and cornices had been devised by ingenious and patient craftsmen, and the same portraits and old engravings hung upon the walls that had been there when its mistress could first remember. She had always been so well suited with her home that she had never desired to change it in any particular. Her maids were well drilled to their duties, and Priscilla, who was chief of the staff, had been in that dignified position for many years. If Miss Prince's grandmother could return to Dunport from another world, she would hardly believe that she had left her earthly home for a day, it presented so nearly the same appearance.

But however conscientiously the effort had been made to keep up the old reputation for hospitality, it had somehow been a failure, and Miss Prince had given fewer entertainments every year. Long ago, while she was still a young woman, she had begun to wear a certain quaint and elderly manner, which might have come from association with such antiquated household gods and a desire to match well with her beloved surroundings. A great many of her early friends had died, and she was not the sort of person who can easily form new ties of intimate friendship. She was very loyal to those who were still left, and, as has been said, her interest in George Gerry, who was his father's namesake and likeness, was a very great pleasure to her. Some persons liked to whisper together now and then about the mysterious niece, who was never mentioned otherwise. But though curiosity had led to a partial knowledge of our heroine's not unfavorable aspect and circumstances, nobody ever dared to give such information to the person who should have been most interested.

This was one of the standard long stories of Dunport with which old residents liked to regale newcomers, and handsome Jack Prince was the hero of a most edifying romance, being represented as a victim of the Prince pride, as his sister had been before him. His life had been ruined, and he had begged his wretched wife at the last to bring him home to Dunport, alive or dead. The woman had treated Miss Prince with shameful impudence and had disappeared afterward. The child had been brought up with her own people, and it was understood that Miss Prince's efforts to have any connection with them were all thwarted. Lately it had become known that the girl's guardian was a very fine man and was taking a great interest in her. But the reader will imagine how this story grew and changed in different people's minds. Some persons insisted that Miss Prince had declined to see her brother's child, and others that it was denied her. It was often said in these days that Nan must be free to do as she chose, but it was more than likely that she had assumed the prejudices against her aunt with which she must have become most familiar.

As for Miss Prince herself, she had long ago become convinced that there was nothing to be done in this matter. After one has followed a certain course for some time, everything seems to persuade one that no other is possible. Sometimes she feared that an excitement and danger lurked in her future, but, after all, her days went by so calmly, and nearer things seemed so much more important than this vague sorrow and dread, that she went to and fro in the Dunport streets, and was courteous and kind in her own house, and read a sensible book now and then, and spent her time as benevolently and respectably as possible. She was indeed an admirable member of society, who had suffered very much in her youth, and those who knew her well could not be too glad that her later years were passing far less unhappily than most people's.

In the days when her niece had lately finished her first winter at the medical school, Miss Prince had just freed herself from the responsibility of some slight repairs which the house had needed. She had been in many ways much more occupied than usual, and had given hardly a thought to more remote affairs. At last there had come an evening when she felt at leisure, and happily Miss Fraley, one of her earliest friends, had come to pay her a visit. The two ladies sat at the front windows of the west parlor looking out upon the street, while the hostess expressed her gratitude that the overturning of her household affairs was at an end, and that she was all in order for summer. They talked about the damage and discomfort inflicted by masons, and the general havoc which follows a small piece of fallen ceiling. Miss Prince, having made a final round of inspection just after tea, had ascertained that the last of the white dimity curtains and coverings were in their places upstairs in the bedrooms, and her love of order was satisfied. She had complimented Priscilla, and made her and the maids the customary spring present, and had returned to her evening post of observation at the parlor window just as Miss Fraley came in. She was not in the mood for receiving guests, being a trifle tired, but Eunice Fraley was a mild little creature, with a gentle, deprecatory manner which had always appealed to Miss Prince's more chivalrous nature. Besides, she knew this to be a most true and affectionate friend, who had also the gift of appearing when everything was ready for her, as the bluebirds come, and the robins, in the early days of spring.

"I wish I could say that our house was all in order but one closet," said the guest, in a more melancholy tone than usual. "I believe we are more behind-hand than ever this year. You know we have Susan's children with us for a fortnight while she goes away for a rest, and they have been a good deal of care. I think mother is getting tired of them now, though she was very eager to have a visit from them at first. She said this morning that the little girl was worse than a kitten in a fit, and she did hope that Susan wouldn't think it best to pass another week away."

Miss Prince laughed a little, and so did Miss Fraley after a moment's hesitation. She seemed to be in a somewhat sentimental and introspective mood as she looked out of the window in the May twilight.

"I so often feel as if I were not accomplishing anything," she said sadly. "It came over me to-day that here I am, really an old woman, and I am just about where I first started,--doing the same things over and over and no better than ever. I haven't the gift of style; anybody else might have done my work just as well, I am afraid; I am sure the world would have got along just as well without me. Mother has been

so active, and has reached such a great age, that perhaps it hasn't been much advantage to me. I have only learned to depend upon her instead of myself. I begin to see that I should have amounted to a great deal more if I had had a home of my own. I sometimes wish that I were as free to go and come as you are, Nancy."

But Miss Prince's thoughts were pleased to take a severely practical turn: "I'm not in the least free," she answered cheerfully. "I believe you need something to strengthen you, Eunice. I haven't seen you so out of spirits for a great while. Free! why I'm tied to this house as if I were the knocker on the front door; and I certainly have a great deal of care. I put the utmost confidence in Priscilla, but those nieces of hers would be going wherever they chose, from garret to cellar, before I was ten miles away from Dunport. I have let the cook go away for a week, and Phoebe and Priscilla are alone. Phoebe is a good little creature; I only hope she won't be married within six months, for I don't know when I have liked a young girl so well. Priscilla was anxious I should take that black-eyed daughter of her brother's, and was quite hurt because I refused."

"I dare say you were right," acknowledged Miss Fraley, though she could not exactly see the obstacles to her friend's freedom in such strong light as was expected.

"I know that it must be difficult for you sometimes," resumed the hostess presently, in a more sympathetic tone. "Your mother naturally finds it hard to give up the rule. We can't expect her to look at life as younger persons do."

"I don't expect it," said poor Miss Fraley appealingly, "and I am sure I try to be considerate; but how would you like it, to be treated as if you were sixteen instead of nearly sixty? I know it says in the Bible that children should obey their parents, but there is no such commandment, that I can see, to women who are old enough to be grandmothers themselves. It does make me perfectly miserable to have everything questioned and talked over that I do; but I know I ought not to say such things. I suppose I shall lie awake half the night grieving over it. You know I have the greatest respect for mother's judgment; I'm sure I don't know what in the world I should do without her."

"You are too yielding, Eunice," said Miss Prince kindly. "You try to please everybody, and that's your way of pleasing yourself; but, after all, I believe we give everybody more satisfaction when we hold fast to our own ideas of right and wrong. There have been a great many friends who were more than willing to give me their advice in all these years that I have been living alone; but I have always made up my mind and gone straight ahead. I have no doubt I should be very

impatient now of much comment and talking over; and yet there are so many times when I would give anything to see father or mother for a little while. I haven't suffered from living alone as much as some persons do, but I often feel very sad and lonely when I sit here and think about the past. Dear me! here is Phoebe with the lights, and I dare say it is just as well. I am going to ask you to go up stairs and see the fresh paint, and how ship-shape we are at last, as father used to say."

Miss Fraley rose at once, with an expression of pleasure, and the two friends made a leisurely tour of the old house which seemed all ready for a large family, and though its owner apparently enjoyed her freedom and dominion, it all looked deserted and empty to her guest. They lingered together in the wide lower hall, and parted with unusual affection. This was by no means the first hint that had been given of a somewhat fettered and disappointing home life, though Miss Fraley would have shuddered at the thought of any such report's being sent abroad.

"Send the children round to see me," said Miss Prince, by way of parting benediction. "They can play in the garden an hour or two, and it will be a change for them and for you;" which invitation was gratefully accepted, though Miss Eunice smiled at the idea of their needing a change, when they were sure to be on every wharf in town in the course of the day, and already knew more people in Dunport than she did.

The next morning Miss Prince's sense of general well-being seemed to have deserted her altogether. She was overshadowed by a fear of impending disaster and felt strangely tired and dissatisfied. But she did not believe in moping, and only assured herself that she must make the day an easy one. So, being strong against tides, as some old poet says of the whale, Miss Prince descended the stairs calmly, and advised Priscilla to put off the special work that had been planned until still later in the week. "You had better ask your sister to come and spend the day with you and have a good, quiet visit," which permission Priscilla received without comment, being a person of few words; but she looked pleased, and while her mistress went down the garden walk to breathe the fresh morning air, she concocted a small omelet as an unexpected addition to the breakfast. Miss Prince was very fond of an omelet, but Priscilla, in spite of all her good qualities, was liable to occasional fits of offishness and depression, and in those seasons kept her employer, in one way or another, on short commons.

The day began serenely. It was the morning for the Dunport weekly paper, which Miss Prince sat down at once to read, making her invariable reproachful remark that there was nothing in it, after

having devoted herself to this duty for an hour or more. Then she mounted to the upper floor of her house to put away a blanket which had been overlooked in the spring packing of the camphor-wood chests which stood in a solemn row in the north corner of the garret. There were three dormer windows in the front of the garret-roof, and one of these had been a favorite abiding-place in her youth. She had played with her prim Dutch dolls there in her childhood, and she could remember spending hour after hour watching for her father's ship when the family had begun to expect him home at the end of a long voyage. She remembered with a smile how grieved she had been because once he came into port late in the night and surprised them all early in the morning, but he had made amends by taking her back with him when he hurried on board again after a hasty greeting. Miss Prince lived that morning over again as she stood there, old and gray and alone in the world. She could see again the great weather-beaten and tar-darkened ship, and even the wizened monkey which belonged to one of the sailors. She lingered at her father's side admiringly, and felt the tears come into her eyes once more when he gave her a taste of the fiery contents of his tumbler. They were all in his cabin; old Captain Dunn and Captain Denny and Captain Peterbeck were sitting round the little table, also provided with tumblers, as they listened eagerly to the story of the voyage. The sailors came now and then for orders; Nancy thought her handsome father, with his bronzed cheeks and white forehead and curly hair, was every inch a king. He was her hero, and nothing could please her so much to the end of her days as to have somebody announce, whether from actual knowledge or hearsay, that Captain Jack Prince was the best shipmaster that ever sailed out of Dunport.... She always was sure there were some presents stored away for herself and young Jack, her brother, in one of the lockers of the little cabin. Poor Jack! how he used to frighten her by climbing the shrouds and waving his cap from almost inaccessible heights. Poor Jack! and Miss Prince climbed the step to look down the harbor again, as if the ship were more than thirty days out from Amsterdam, and might be expected at any time if the voyage had been favorable.

The house was at no great distance from the water side, though the crowded buildings obscured the view from the lower stories. There was nothing coming in from sea but a steam-tug, which did not harmonize with these pleasant reminiscences, though as Miss Prince raised the window a fine salt breeze entered, well warmed with the May sunshine. It had the flavor of tar and the spirit of the high seas, and for a wonder there could be heard the knocking of shipwrights' hammers, which in old times were never silent in the town. As she sat there for a few minutes in the window seat, there came to her other recollections of her later girlhood, when she had stolen to this corner for the sake of being alone with her pleasant thoughts, though she had cried there many an hour after Jack's behavior had given them the sorrow they hardly would own to each other. She remembered hearing

her father's angry voice down stairs. No! she would not think of that again, why should she? and she shut the window and went back to be sure that she had locked the camphor chest, and hung its key on the flat-headed rusty nail overhead. Miss Prince heard some one open and shut the front door as she went down, and in the small front room she found Captain Walter Parish, who held a high place among her most intimate friends. He was her cousin, and had become her general adviser and counselor. He sometimes called himself laughingly the ship's husband, for it was he who transacted most of Miss Prince's important business, and selected her paint and shingles and her garden seeds beside, and made and mended her pens. He liked to be useful and agreeable, but he had not that satisfaction in his own home, for his wife had been a most efficient person to begin with, and during his absences at sea in early life had grown entirely self-reliant. The captain joked about it merrily, but he nevertheless liked to feel that he was still important, and Miss Prince generously told him, from time to time, that she did not know how she should get on without him, and considerately kept up the fiction of not wishing to take up his time when he must be busy with his own affairs.

"How are you this fine morning, Cousin Nancy?" said the captain gallantly. "I called to say that Jerry Martin will be here to-morrow without fail. It seems he thought you would send him word when you wanted him next, and he has been working for himself. I don't think the garden will suffer, we have had so much cold weather. And here is a letter I took from the office." He handed it to Miss Prince with a questioning look; he knew the handwriting of her few correspondents almost as well as she, and this was a stranger's.

"Perhaps it is a receipt for my subscription to the"--But Miss Prince never finished the sentence, for when she had fairly taken the letter into her hand, the very touch of it seemed to send a tinge of ashen gray like some quick poison over her face. She stood still, looking at it, then flushed crimson, and sat down in the nearest chair, as if it were impossible to hold herself upright. The captain was uncertain what he ought to do.

"I hope you haven't heard bad news," he said presently, for Miss Prince had leaned back in the arm-chair and covered her eyes with one hand, while the letter was tightly held in the other.

"It is from my niece," she answered, slowly.

"You don't mean it's from Jack's daughter?" inquired the captain, not without eagerness. He never had suspected such a thing; the only explanation which had suggested itself to his mind was that Miss Prince had been investing some of her money without his advice or knowledge, and he had gone so far as to tell himself that it was just

like a woman, and quite good enough for her if she had lost it. "I never thought of its being from her," he said, a little bewildered, for the captain was not a man of quick wit; his powers of reflection served him better. "Well, aren't you going to tell me what she has to say for herself?"

"She proposes to make me a visit," answered Miss Prince, trying to smile as she handed him the little sheet of paper which she had unconsciously crumpled together; but she did not give even one glance at his face as he read it, though she thought it a distressingly long time before he spoke.

"I must say that this is a very good letter, very respectful and lady-like," said the captain honestly, though he felt as if he had been expected to condemn it, and proceeded to read it through again, this time aloud:--

> MY DEAR AUNT,--I cannot think it is right that we do not know each other. I should like to go to Dunport for a day some time next month; but if you do not wish to see me you have only to tell me so, and I will not trouble you.
>
> Yours sincerely,
> ANNA PRINCE.

"A very good handwriting, too," the captain remarked, and then gathered courage to say that he supposed Miss Prince would give her niece the permission for which she asked. "I have been told that she is a very fine girl," he ventured, as if he were poor Nan's ambassador; and at this Miss Prince's patience gave way.

"Yes, I shall ask her to come, but I do not wish anything said about it; it need not be made the talk of the town." She answered her cousin angrily, and then felt as if she had been unjust. "Do not mind me, Walter," she said; "it has been a terrible grief and trouble to me all these years. Perhaps if I had gone to see those people, and told them all I felt, they would have pitied me, and not blamed me, and so everything would have been better, but it is too late now. I don't know what sort of a person my own niece is, and I wish that I need never find out, but I shall try to do my duty."

The captain was tender-hearted, and seemed quite unmanned, but he gave his eyes a sudden stroke with his hand and turned to go away. "You will command me, Nancy, if I can be of service to you?" he inquired, and his cousin bowed her head in assent. It was, indeed, a dismal hour of the family history.

For some time Miss Prince did not move, except as she watched Captain

Parish cross the street and take his leisurely way along the uneven pavement. She was almost tempted to call him back, and felt as if he were the last friend she had in the world, and was leaving her forever. But after she had allowed the worst of the miserable shock to spend itself, she summoned the stern energy for which she was famous, and going with slower steps than usual to the next room, she unlocked the desk of the ponderous secretary and seated herself to write. Before many minutes had passed the letter was folded, and sealed, and addressed, and the next evening Nan was reading it at Oldfields. She was grateful for being asked to come on the 5th of June to Dunport, and to stay a few days if it were convenient, and yet her heart fell because there was not a sign of welcome or affection in the stately fashioning of the note. It had been hardly wise to expect it under the circumstances, the girl assured herself later, and at any rate it was kind in her aunt to answer her own short letter so soon.

THE SUPREME NIGHT

from *Mashi and Other Stories*, by Rabindranath Tagore
EBook #34757

I used to go to the same dame's school with Surabala and play at marriage with her. When I paid visits to her house, her mother would pet me, and setting us side by side would say to herself: 'What a lovely pair!'

I was a child then, but I could understand her meaning well enough. The idea became rooted in my mind that I had a special right to Surabala above that of people in general. So it happened that, in the pride of ownership, at times I punished and tormented her; and she, too, fagged for me and bore all my punishments without complaint. The village was wont to praise her beauty; but in the eyes of a young barbarian like me that beauty had no glory;--I knew only that Surabala had been born in her father's house solely to bear my yoke, and that therefore she was the particular object of my neglect.

My father was the land-steward of the Chaudhuris, a family of _zemindars_. It was his plan, as soon as I had learnt to write a good hand, to train me in the work of estate management and secure a rent collectorship for me somewhere. But in my heart I disliked the proposal. Nilratan of our village had run away to Calcutta, had learnt English there, and finally became the _Nazir_[11] of the District Magistrate; _that_ was my life's ideal: I was secretly determined to be the Head Clerk of the Judge's Court, even if I could not become the Magistrate's _Nazir_.

[11] Superintendent of bailiffs.

I saw that my father always treated these court officers with the greatest respect. I knew from my childhood that they had to be propitiated with gifts of fish, vegetables, and even money. For this reason I had given a seat of high honour in my heart to the court underlings, even to the bailiffs. These are the gods worshipped in our Bengal,--a modern miniature edition of the 330 millions of deities of the Hindu pantheon. For gaining material success, people have more genuine faith in _them_ than in the good Ganesh, the giver of success; hence the people now offer to these officers everything that was formerly Ganesh's due.

Fired by the example of Nilratan, I too seized a suitable opportunity and ran away to Calcutta. There I first put up in the house of a village acquaintance, and afterwards got some funds from my father for my education. Thus I carried on my studies regularly.

In addition, I joined political and benevolent societies. I had no doubt whatever that it was urgently necessary for me to give my life suddenly for my country. But I knew not how such a hard task could be carried out. Also no one showed me the way.

But, nevertheless, my enthusiasm did not abate at all. We country lads had not learnt to sneer at everything like the precocious boys of Calcutta, and hence our faith was very strong. The 'leaders' of our associations delivered speeches, and we went begging for subscriptions from door to door in the hot blaze of noon without breaking our fast; or we stood by the roadside distributing hand-bills, or arranged the chairs and benches in the lecture-hall, and, if anybody whispered a word against our leader, we got ready to fight him. For these things the city boys used to laugh at us as provincials.

I had come to Calcutta to be a _Nazir_ or a Head Clerk, but I was preparing to become a Mazzini or a Garibaldi.

At this time Surabala's father and my father laid their heads together to unite us in marriage. I had come to Calcutta at the age of fifteen; Surabala was eight years old then. I was now eighteen, and in my father's opinion I was almost past the age of marriage. But it was my secret vow to remain unmarried all my life and to die for my country; so I told my father that I would not marry before I had finished my education.

In two or three months I learnt that Surabala had been married to a pleader named Ram Lochan. I was then busy collecting subscriptions for raising fallen India, and this news did not seem worth my thought.

I had matriculated, and was about to appear at the Intermediate Examination, when my father died. I was not alone in the world, but had to maintain my mother and two sisters. I had therefore to leave college and look out for employment. After a good deal of exertion I secured the post of second master in the matriculation school of a small town in the Noakhali District.

I thought, here is just the work for me! By my advice and inspiration I shall train up every one of my pupils as a general for future India.

I began to work, and then found that the impending examination was a more pressing affair than the future of India. The headmaster got angry whenever I talked of anything outside grammar or algebra. And in a few months my enthusiasm, too, flagged.

I am no genius. In the quiet of the home I may form vast plans; but when I enter the field of work, I have to bear the yoke of the plough

on my neck like the Indian bullock, get my tail twisted by my master, break clods all day, patiently and with bowed head, and then at sunset have to be satisfied if I can get any cud to chew. Such a creature has not the spirit to prance and caper.

One of the teachers lived in the school-house, to guard against fires. As I was a bachelor, this work was thrown on me. I lodged in a thatched shed close to the large cottage in which the school sat.

The school-house stood at some distance from the inhabited portion of the town, and beside a big tank. Around it were betel-nut, cocoa-nut, and _madar_ trees, and very near to the school building two large ancient _nim_ trees grew close together, and cast a cool shade around.

One thing I have forgotten to mention, and indeed I had not so long considered it worth mentioning. The local Government pleader, Ram Lochan Ray, lived near our school. I also knew that his wife--my early playmate, Surabala--lived with him.

I got acquainted with Ram Lochan Babu. I cannot say whether he knew that I had known Surabala in childhood. I did not think fit to mention the fact at my first introduction to him. Indeed, I did not clearly remember that Surabala had been ever linked with my life in any way.

One holiday I paid a visit to Ram Lochan Babu. The subject of our conversation has gone out of my mind; probably it was the unhappy condition of present-day India. Not that he was very much concerned or heart-broken over the matter; but the subject was such that one could freely pour forth one's sentimental sorrow over it for an hour or two while puffing at one's _hooka_.

While thus engaged, I heard in a side-room the softest possible jingle of bracelets, crackle of dress, and footfall; and I felt certain that two curious eyes were watching me through a small opening of the window.

All at once there flashed upon my memory a pair of eyes,--a pair of large eyes, beaming with trust, simplicity, and girlhood's love,--black pupils,--thick dark eyelashes,--a calm fixed gaze. Suddenly some unseen force squeezed my heart in an iron grip, and it throbbed with intense pain.

I returned to my house, but the pain clung to me. Whether I read, wrote, or did any other work, I could not shake that weight off my heart; a heavy load seemed to be always swinging from my heart-strings.

In the evening, calming myself a little, I began to reflect: 'What ails me?' From within came the question: 'Where is _your_ Surabala now?' I replied: 'I gave her up of my free will. Surely I did not

expect her to wait for me for ever.'

But something kept saying: '_Then_ you could have got her merely for the asking. _Now_ you have not the right to look at her even once, do what you will. That Surabala of your boyhood may come very close to you; you may hear the jingle of her bracelets; you may breathe the air embalmed by the essence of her hair,--but there will always be a wall between you two.'

I answered: 'Be it so. What is Surabala to me?'

My heart rejoined: 'To-day Surabala is nobody to you. But what might she not have been to you?'

Ah! that's true. _What_ might she not have been to me? Dearest to me of all things, closer to me than the world besides, the sharer of all my life's joys and sorrows,--she might have been. And now, she is so distant, so much of a stranger, that to look on her is forbidden, to talk with her is improper, and to think of her is a sin!--while this Ram Lochan, coming suddenly from nowhere, has muttered a few set religious texts, and in one swoop has carried off Surabala from the rest of mankind!

I have not come to preach a new ethical code, or to revolutionise society; I have no wish to tear asunder domestic ties. I am only expressing the exact working of my mind, though it may not be reasonable. I could not by any means banish from my mind the sense that Surabala, reigning there within shelter of Ram Lochan's home, was mine far more than his. The thought was, I admit, unreasonable and improper,--but it was not unnatural.

Thereafter I could not set my mind to any kind of work. At noon when the boys in my class hummed, when Nature outside simmered in the sun, when the sweet scent of the _nim_ blossoms entered the room on the tepid breeze, I then wished,--I know not what I wished for; but this I can say, that I did not wish to pass all my life in correcting the grammar exercises of those future hopes of India.

When school was over, I could not bear to live in my large lonely house; and yet, if any one paid me a visit, it bored me. In the gloaming as I sat by the tank and listened to the meaningless breeze sighing through the betel- and cocoa-nut palms, I used to muse that human society is a web of mistakes; nobody has the sense to do the right thing at the right time, and when the chance is gone we break our hearts over vain longings.

I could have married Surabala and lived happily. But I must be a Garibaldi,--and I ended by becoming the second master of a village

school! And pleader Ram Lochan Ray, who had no special call to be Surabala's husband,--to whom, before his marriage, Surabala was no wise different from a hundred other maidens,--has very quietly married her, and is earning lots of money as Government pleader; when his dinner is badly cooked he scolds Surabala, and when he is in good humour he gives her a bangle! He is sleek and fat, tidily dressed, free from every kind of worry; _he_ never passes his evenings by the tank gazing at the stars and sighing.

Ram Lochan was called away from our town for a few days by a big case elsewhere. Surabala in her house was as lonely as I was in my school building.

I remember it was a Monday. The sky was overcast with clouds from the morning. It began to drizzle at ten o'clock. At the aspect of the heavens our headmaster closed the school early. All day the black detached clouds began to run about in the sky as if making ready for some grand display. Next day, towards afternoon, the rain descended in torrents, accompanied by storm. As the night advanced the fury of wind and water increased. At first the wind was easterly; gradually it veered, and blew towards the south and south-west.

It was idle to try to sleep on such a night. I remembered that in this terrible weather Surabala was alone in her house. Our school was much more strongly built than her bungalow. Often and often did I plan to invite her to the school-house, while I meant to pass the night alone by the tank. But I could not summon up courage for it.

When it was half-past one in the morning, the roar of the tidal wave was suddenly heard,--the sea was rushing on us! I left my room and ran towards Surabala's house. In the way stood one embankment of our tank, and as I was wading to it the flood already reached my knees. When I mounted the bank, a second wave broke on it. The highest part of the bank was more than seventeen feet above the plain.

As I climbed up the bank, another person reached it from the opposite side. Who she was, every fibre of my body knew at once, and my whole soul was thrilled with the consciousness. I had no doubt that she, too, had recognised me.

On an island some three yards in area stood we two; all else was covered with water.

It was a time of cataclysm; the stars had been blotted out of the sky; all the lights of the earth had been darkened; there would have been no harm if we had held converse _then_. But we could not bring ourselves to utter a word; neither of us made even a formal inquiry after the other's health. Only we stood gazing at the darkness. At our

feet swirled the dense, black, wild, roaring torrent of death.

To-day Surabala has come to _my_ side, leaving the whole world. To-day she has none besides _me_. In our far-off childhood this Surabala had come from some dark primeval realm of mystery, from a life in another orb, and stood by my side on this luminous peopled earth; and to-day, after a wide span of time, she has left that earth, so full of light and human beings, to stand alone by _my_ side amidst this terrible desolate gloom of Nature's death-convulsion. The stream of birth had flung that tender bud before me, and the flood of death had wafted the same flower, now in full bloom, to _me_ and to none else. One more wave and we shall be swept away from this extreme point of the earth, torn from the stalks on which we now sit apart, and made one in death.

May that wave never come! May Surabala live long and happily, girt round by husband and children, household and kinsfolk! This one night, standing on the brink of Nature's destruction, I have tasted eternal bliss.

The night wore out, the tempest ceased, the flood abated; without a word spoken, Surabala went back to her house, and I, too, returned to my shed without having uttered a word.

I reflected: True, I have become no _Nazir_ or Head Clerk, nor a Garibaldi; I am only the second master of a beggarly school. But one night had for its brief space beamed upon my whole life's course.

That one night, out of all the days and nights of my allotted span, has been the supreme glory of my humble existence.

THE HONORED PROPHET

[Project Gutenberg EBook #32316]

BY William E. Bentley

The black dwarf sun sent its assassin on a mission which was calculated to erase the threat to its existence. But prophesies run in strange patterns and, sometimes, an act of evasion becomes an act of fulfillment....

* * * * *

The ruler of a planet with a black dwarf sun had called a meeting of the council. It was some time before they were assembled, and he waited patiently without thought.

When the patchwork of mentalities was complete he allowed the conclusions of the prognosticator to occupy his mind. A wall of unanimous incredulity sprang up. The statement was that when the inhabitants of a distant planet achieved space flight they would come to this planet, and use a weapon invented by an individual to destroy it. The prognosticator could not lie, and soon the facade dissolved into individual reactions as acceptance became general. Anger, fear, resignation, and greedy little thoughts of self-aggrandizement. Those thoughts were replaced by a quiescent, questioning receptivity. The questioning grew out of proportion, became hysterical, assumed the panic shape. Self-preservation demanding that there be a solution. Minor prophecies had been evaded before. Details of the individual had been supplied, could not something be done?

The Assassin was summoned.

The pattern of Dr. Simon Cartwright's encephalic emanations, and the approximate position of the center of these emanations were impressed on its mind. And in a strangely bulbous ship it plunged outward from that eternally dark and silent planet towards Earth.

* * * * *

A man was walking along a road. A high road. A silent, dark road. Below him on both sides of the road flat marshland swept away, and a little wind caressed him with chill fingers. His tiny world of road beneath him, darkness around him, sky above him, contained only the sound of his footsteps--and one other. A regular, liquid sound. He thought it was a sound from the marsh. He listened to it, and wondered

how long it had been with him. It was close behind him on the road. He stopped, turned round in small curiosity, and bellowed in great horror. He threw up his hands against an immense bulk, a frog-like shape, a lurching, flowing movement. Then it was upon him, and stilled his futile writhings, and passed over him, and left him dead.

The Assassin continued along the road. It was aware that it had killed, but it could not contemplate the fact. It possessed all the mental powers of its race, but its conditioning had focused them in one direction, the assassination of Dr. Cartwright. It could consider only those factors which had a direct relation to that purpose.

Daylight was one of those factors.

It was not aware of the passage of time, but when the sensitive patch on its back began to contract it left the road and went to the marsh. There it burrowed into the slime until green-flecked water closed over it. And deeper until a depth of mud protected it from the sun.

Dr. Cartwright groaned and sat up in bed. He silenced the ringing telephone by putting the receiver to his ear.

"Do you know what time it is?" he asked, aggrieved.

"Hello? Doctor Cartwright? This is the police."

"It is half-past seven," continued Simon. "For me, the middle of the night. I am in no fit state to measure a drunk's reactions."

"I'm sorry, sir, but there's been an accident. On the Waverton Highway. A man is dead, Inspector Andrews is in charge of the case."

"Inspector Andrews? Is mayhem suspected? Never mind, I'll get down there, right away."

He put the receiver down and got out of bed. His wife muttered something unintelligible and wrapped his share of the blankets round her. Simon went downstairs. He made a cup of coffee and drank it while he dressed. The engine of his car was cold, but his house was on a hill and he was able to coast down to the Highway.

The road was level and straight, and after a few minutes driving a little tableau came into sight--two cars, a group of uniforms. Inspector Andrews, tall, thin, dyspeptic, greeted him with a limp handshake. "Something funny about this," he said. "See what you think."

Simon went down on one knee beside the body and began to undo the clothing. After a time he looked up into the sky. "This is very strange," he murmured.

"I know," grunted Andrews. "Can they take the body now?"

Simon stood up and nodded. He remained staring out across the marsh until the body had been removed, and the ambulance a distant object. Then he went and sat in his car. Andrews finished giving instructions to his Sergeant, and joined him. "I'll let you give me breakfast," he said.

"You're very kind," said Simon absently, and released the brake.

"Any use asking for the cause of death?" asked Andrews.

"Oh, the cause of death was crushing, but the cause of the cause of death--" Simon shook his head. "There wasn't an unbroken bone in his body. Could he have been dropped from an airplane?"

Andrews shook a ponderous head. "He was a bus driver on his way to work without an enemy in the world. And I've a feeling his death is going to keep me awake at nights. Anyway, Sergeant Bennet is going over the area with a magnifying glass. We'll put up a pretty good show. Can you suggest anything?"

"It wasn't a car," said Simon carefully. "The skin was unbroken, except from the inside. I can only imagine something like a rubber-covered steam-roller."

* * * * *

That night the Assassin killed two people.

When it grew dark it heaved itself up out of the slime. A long business of bodily expansion and contraction. Two men were on the road and heard the noise it made.

"Somethin' out there."

"Stray cow, maybe."

They stood and peered into the dark, trying to see a familiar shape. The Assassin approached them, and was too big for them to see. They stood in its path and looked for a familiar object in the blackness of its body. So the instant of apprehension was small, the panic and exertion soon over. Without pausing the Assassin moved over them and continued on its way.

A little later Inspector Andrews found them. He was in a radio patrol car, and he was moving in the same direction as the Assassin. With him in the car were three large men carrying automatic rifles. Andrews stopped the car, and one of the men got out and knelt by the bodies. Andrews watched him somberly for a moment then reached for the microphone. He spoke to the station sergeant.

"Inspector Andrews here. Send an ambulance out here, will you, and phone Doctor Cartwright. Tell him the steam-roller's loose again. It may be on the road heading his way. Yes, steam-roller. He'll understand."

He put the microphone down, called to the man on the road. "I'm leaving you here, Roberts. There's an ambulance on its way. Go back with it. Get in Sergeant Bennet's car and both of you join us up ahead."

He closed the car window and released the brake. The empty road began to unwind slowly into the area of light ahead.

Simon put the receiver down and looked at his wife. She was concentrating on a sock by the fire. He went over and kissed the top of her head. "Goodbye," she said.

"Listen," he said quietly. "When I'm gone lock the door behind me and don't go out. If you hear any funny noises go down to the cellar. Understand?"

She was a little frightened. "Honey, what is it?"

He smiled. "It's nothing. Long John Andrews is out hunting. I'm going along in case he shoots himself."

He took his shot-gun off the mantle and stuffed his pockets with cartridges.

"I'll bring you back a rabbit," he said. "So long."

He drove down slowly. He was scared, but he was still young enough to find it exhilarating. The loaded shot-gun was a great help.

He turned on to the highway, and slowed to walking pace. He stared into the darkness ahead until his eyes burned, and imagination peopled his surroundings with writhing shapes.

Then he saw it, and the muscles across his chest trembled

convulsively. Fear clutched his stomach. He slammed his foot down on the brake and gaped up at it. It was standing still in the middle of the road, a giant, pear shaped body, looking something like a man kneeling upright. At the front, turned inwards, were a number of arm-like appendages.

The shot-gun was ridiculous now, the car made of paper. To get out and run was impossible, and he longed to be able to sit still and do nothing. And the seconds dragged by. Time for contemplation built up, and a strange realization dropped into his seething mind. He sensed something about its attitude. A cringing, a withdrawal. "God," he whispered. "It doesn't like the light."

He might have relaxed then, but it moved. One of its arms unfolded, swung outward holding something metallic. Simon yelled. He grabbed the shot-gun, shoved the door catch down, threw his weight sideways. He landed on his shoulder and kept on rolling. He reached the other side of the road, straightened up, and saw the roof of the car fly off with a roar. He fired then, from a crouching position and without taking aim. A lucky shot that hit the end of the weapon arm and shattered it. Then he ran, and the Assassin followed.

He ran in the direction he'd been heading, and gave himself up to terror. He was primaeval man fleeing from sabre-tooth. He was living a nightmare. His brain reeled, air burnt his lungs, and his pounding heart echoed in his temples. Then he was running into a blaze of light, between headlights that enfolded him like a mother's arms, and he was clinging to a radiator cap. Dimly he heard the crash of high powered rifles about him. A black figure came into his haven of light, began to loosen his tie.

"Get out of the light," he gasped. "It doesn't like the light."

"Who invited you?" grunted Andrews. He put Simon's arm round his neck, and half carried him round to the side of the car, pushed him into the front seat.

"I'll be all right in a minute," said Simon.

"Yeah," said Andrews, and left him.

After a little while the trembling in his limbs began to subside, breathing became easier. He leaned forward and watched a strange battle. The Assassin was about seventy yards ahead, moving slowly nearer. Two men stood on the right hand side of the car, pumping bullets into the grey, indistinct mass. Andrews stood watching with his hands in his jacket pockets. Suddenly he said, "All right, let go. You're only wasting bullets."

Simon looked at him in alarm. "Hey, you're not just going to stand there. It doesn't like the light, but light can't kill it."

"Lie down on the floor," said Andrews dourly, without looking at him.

"Eh?"

Andrews ignored him, stepped two paces forward. The Assassin was about twenty yards away now, seeming to have to fight against the stream of light. Andrews took his hands from his pockets. Simon saw what he was holding, and dived for the floor. He clasped his hands over the back of his neck as the night exploded with a gigantic crash.

When his ears had stopped screaming he got up. Andrews, an elbow on the window ledge, was watching him expressionlessly.

"You might have left me something to dissect," complained Simon. "Somebody's got to, you know."

"I'll mop you up a sponge full," said Andrews.

"Oh, no, you won't. You and your men stay back here. It's probably crawling with alien bacteria."

Actually, quite a lot of the Assassin was left, but decomposition was very rapid. Simon did the best he could with a magnifying glass and a penknife. He found that the body was almost entirely composed of bone and flesh in a honey-comb like structure. The bone being highly flexible, and the cavities filled with grey flesh. Flesh which quickly liquified and drained away from the bone. There was no blood, and Simon could find no trace of internal organs.

While he worked two more cars drove up, and gave him a little more light, but soon he had to give up. As he walked slowly back a spotlight sprang suddenly to life, and a pleasant authoritative voice spoke.

"Will you stay where you are, please, Doctor Cartwright."

Simon obeyed. Hell, he thought wearily. Officialdom has arrived. He shaded his eyes against the light, but he could see nothing.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"Commanding officer in charge of operations in this emergency. You've made an examination?"

"As far as I could. There's complete decomposition now."

"Oh, I see." A slight pause, then; "Perhaps I'd better put you in the picture. This is armed aggression, Doctor Cartwright. In any language it says war. Do you understand? We're at war, now.

"We found the vessel your friend came in several days ago. It was in the sea, twenty miles from here. Its discovery was kept secret because we weren't sure of its point of origin. Our people are engaged in finding the method of propulsion. They say it will give us the ability to travel in space. They also say that they can find the approximate position of its home planet. All that is top priority, of course, but in the meanwhile we must have an emergency line of defence against these things. We want to know how to find them and how to destroy them with the least possible expenditure of life and material. You understand?"

"Yes. I've got an idea about light waves. I fired a shot at it back there. The bone structure--"

"Don't tell me," interrupted the voice sharply. "Remember it. You realize, Doctor Cartwright, that you are just about the most important man alive. You know how fast it can move. You have fought it, you have examined it. So you can be sure that very good care will be taken of you."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm sorry, but you must see that you have to go into strict quarantine now. We dare not risk a plague. After quarantine you will go to work with our people. Now will you please get into the car at the extreme right, and follow the police."

"Where am I going?"

"Please hurry. There is a team of incendiaries waiting to clear the area."

"Oh, damnation," sighed The Most Important Man Alive, and walked towards the waiting car.

* * * * *

When the ruler consulted the prognosticator again, after the Assassin's failure had been recorded, he found that a qualification had been added. The prophecy was now being fulfilled. He considered this dispassionately. He visualised the complex pattern of implication almost with pleasure. Was the machine alive? Certainly it could

contemplate itself. It had calculated the effect of its existence, and had used the knowledge to destroy them. Or had they condemned themselves? By losing the ability to question. For the information on which the prophecy was based could have been available to them. Or was the machine only obeying a greater Fate? A Decree, stating that any life-form that surrendered itself to the dictates of a machine was doomed.

One thing alone was left to him. A choice. Without haste he began the preliminaries to thinking himself to death.

The Cloud.
by Percy Bysshe Shelley, from *The Hundred Best English Poems*, by Various,
Edited by Adam L. Gowans PG eBook #17768

I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers,
From the seas and the streams;
I bear light shade for the leaves when laid
In their noon-day dreams.
From my wings are shaken the dews that waken
The sweet buds every one,
When rocked to rest on their mother's breast,
As she dances about the sun.
I wield the flail of the lashing hail,
And whiten the green plains under,
And then again I dissolve it in rain,
And laugh as I pass in thunder.

I sift the snow on the mountains below,
And their great pines groan aghast;
And all the night 'tis my pillow white,
While I sleep in the arms of the blast.
Sublime on the towers of my skiey bowers,
Lightning my pilot sits,
In a cavern under is fettered the thunder,
It struggles and howls at fits;
Over earth and ocean, with gentle motion,
This pilot is guiding me,
Lured by the love of the genii that move
In the depths of the purple sea;
Over the rills, and the crags, and the hills,
Over the lakes and the plains,
Wherever he dream, under mountain or stream,
The Spirit he loves remains;
And I all the while bask in heaven's blue smile,
Whilst he is dissolving in rains.

The sanguine sunrise, with his meteor eyes,
And his burning plumes outspread,
Leaps on the back of my sailing rack,
When the morning star shines dead,
As on the jag of a mountain crag,
Which an earthquake rocks and swings,
An eagle alit one moment may sit
In the light of its golden wings.
And when sunset may breathe, from the lit sea beneath,
Its ardours of rest and of love,
And the crimson pall of eve may fall

From the depth of heaven above,
With wings folded I rest, on mine airy nest,
As still as a brooding dove.

That orbŁd maiden with white fire laden,
Whom mortals call the moon,
Glides glimmering o'er my fleece-like floor,
By the midnight breezes strewn;
And wherever the beat of her unseen feet,
Which only the angels hear,
May have broken the woof of my tent's thin roof,
The stars peep behind her and peer;
And I laugh to see them whirl and flee,
Like a swarm of golden bees,
When I widen the rent in my wind-built tent,
Till the calm rivers, lakes, and seas,
Like strips of the sky fallen through me on high,
Are each paved with the moon and these.

I bind the sun's throne with a burning zone,
And the moon's with a girdle of pearl;
The volcanoes are dim, and the stars reel and swim,
When the whirlwinds my banner unfurl.
From cape to cape, with a bridge-like shape,
Over a torrent sea,
Sunbeam-proof, I hang like a roof,
The mountains its columns be.
The triumphal arch through which I march
With hurricane, fire, and snow,
When the powers of the air are chained to my chair,
Is the million-coloured bow;
The sphere-fire above its soft colours wove,
While the moist earth was laughing below.

I am the daughter of earth and water,
And the nursling of the sky;
I pass through the pores of the ocean and shores;
I change, but I cannot die.
For after the rain when with never a stain,
The pavilion of heaven is bare,
And the winds and sunbeams with their convex gleams,
Build up the blue dome of air,
I silently laugh at my own cenotaph,
And out of the caverns of rain,
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
I arise and unbuild it again.

EULALIE.

from *Edgar Allan Poe's Complete Poetical Works*
EBook #10031

I dwelt alone
In a world of moan,
And my soul was a stagnant tide,
Till the fair and gentle Eulalie became my blushing bride--
Till the yellow-haired young Eulalie became my smiling bride.
Ah, less--less bright
The stars of the night
Than the eyes of the radiant girl!
And never a flake
That the vapor can make
With the moon-tints of purple and pearl,
Can vie with the modest Eulalie's most unregarded curl--
Can compare with the bright-eyed Eulalie's most humble and careless curl.
Now Doubt--now Pain
Come never again,
For her soul gives me sigh for sigh,
And all day long
Shines, bright and strong,
Astarte within the sky,
While ever to her dear Eulalie upturns her matron eye--
While ever to her young Eulalie upturns her violet eye.

1845.

THE GHOST IN THE CROSSTREES

from *A Deal in Wheat and Other Stories*, by Frank Norris
EBook #9905

I

Cyrus Ryder, the President of the South Pacific Exploitation Company, had at last got hold of a "proposition"--all Ryder's schemes were, in his vernacular, "propositions"--that was not only profitable beyond precedent or belief, but that also was, wonderful to say, more or less legitimate. He had got an "island." He had not discovered it. Ryder had not felt a deck under his shoes for twenty years other than the promenade deck of the ferry-boat _San Rafael_, that takes him home to Berkeley every evening after "business hours." He had not discovered it, but "Old Rosemary," captain of the barkentine _Scottish Chief_, of Blyth, had done that very thing, and, dying before he was able to perfect the title, had made over his interest in it to his best friend and old comrade, Cyrus Ryder.

"Old Rosemary," I am told, first landed on the island--it is called Paa--in the later '60's.

He established its location and took its latitude and longitude, but as minutes and degrees mean nothing to the lay reader, let it be said that the Island of Paa lies just below the equator, some 200 miles west of the Gilberts and 1,600 miles due east from Brisbane, in Australia. It is six miles long, three wide, and because of the prevailing winds and precipitous character of the coast can only be approached from the west during December and January.

"Old Rosemary" landed on the island, raised the American flag, had the crew witness the document by virtue of which he made himself the possessor, and then, returning to San Francisco, forwarded to the Secretary of State, at Washington, application for title. This was withheld till it could be shown that no other nation had a prior claim. While "Old Rosemary" was working out the proof, he died, and the whole matter was left in abeyance till Cyrus Ryder took it up. By then there was a new Secretary in Washington and times were changed, so that the Government of Ryder's native land was not so averse toward acquiring Eastern possessions. The Secretary of State wrote to Ryder to say that the application would be granted upon furnishing a bond for $50,000; and you may believe that the bond was forthcoming.

For in the first report upon Paa, "Old Rosemary" had used the magic word "guano."

He averred, and his crew attested over their sworn statements, that Paa

was covered to an average depth of six feet with the stuff, so that this last and biggest of "Cy" Ryder's propositions was a vast slab of an extremely marketable product six feet thick, three miles wide and six miles long.

But no sooner had the title been granted when there came a dislocation in the proceedings that until then had been going forward so smoothly. Ryder called the Three Black Crows to him at this juncture, one certain afternoon in the month of April. They were his best agents. The plums that the "Company" had at its disposal generally went to the trio, and if any man could "put through" a dangerous and desperate piece of work, Strokher, Hardenberg and Ally Bazan were those men.

Of late they had been unlucky, and the affair of the contraband arms, which had ended in failure of cataclysmic proportions, yet rankled in Ryder's memory, but he had no one else to whom he could intrust the present proposition and he still believed Hardenberg to be the best boss on his list.

If Paa was to be fought for, Hardenberg, backed by Strokher and Ally Bazan, was the man of all men for the job, for it looked as though Ryder would not get the Island of Paa without a fight after all, and nitrate beds were worth fighting for.

"You see, boys, it's this way," Ryder explained to the three as they sat around the spavined table in the grimy back room of Ryder's "office." "It's this way. There's a scoovy after Paa, I'm told; he says he was there before 'Rosemary,' which is a lie, and that his Gov'ment has given him title. He's got a kind of dough-dish up Portland way and starts for Paa as soon as ever he kin fit out. He's got no title, in course, but if he gits there afore we do and takes possession it'll take fifty years o' lawing an' injunctioning to git him off. So hustle is the word for you from the word 'go.' We got a good start o' the scoovy. He can't put to sea within a week, while over yonder in Oakland Basin there's the _Idaho Lass_, as good a schooner, boys, as ever wore paint, all ready but to fit her new sails on her. Ye kin do it in less than no time. The stores will be goin' into her while ye're workin', and within the week I expect to see the _Idaho Lass_ showing her heels to the Presidio. You see the point now, boys. If ye beat the scoovy--his name is Petersen, and his boat is called the _Elftruda_--we're to the wind'ard of a pretty pot o' money. If he gets away before you do--well, there's no telling; we prob'ly lose the island."

II

About ten days before the morning set for their departure I went over to the Oakland Basin to see how the Three Black Crows were getting on.

Hardenberg welcomed me as my boat bumped alongside, and extending a great tarry paw, hauled me over the rail. The schooner was a wilderness of confusion, with the sails covering, apparently, nine-tenths of the decks, the remaining tenth encumbered by spars, cordage, tangled rigging, chains, cables and the like, all helter-skeltered together in such a haze of entanglements that my heart misgave me as I looked on it. Surely order would not issue from this chaos in four days' time with only three men to speed the work.

But Hardenberg was reassuring, and little Ally Bazan, the colonial, told me they would "snatch her shipshape in the shorter end o' two days, if so be they must."

I stayed with the Three Crows all that day and shared their dinner with them on the quarterdeck when, wearied to death with the strain of wrestling with the slatting canvas and ponderous boom, they at last threw themselves upon the hamper of "cold snack" I had brought off with me and pledged the success of the venture in tin dippers full of Pilsener.

"And I'm thinking," said Ally Bazan, "as 'ow ye might as well turn in along o' us on board 'ere, instead o' hykin' back to town to-night. There's a fairish set o' currents up and daown 'ere about this time o' dye, and ye'd find it a stiff bit o' rowing."

"We'll sling a hammick for you on the quarterdeck, m'son," urged Hardenberg.

And so it happened that I passed my first night aboard the _Idaho Lass_.

We turned in early. The Three Crows were very tired, and only Ally Bazan and I were left awake at the time when we saw the 8:30 ferryboat negotiating for her slip on the Oakland side. Then we also went to bed.

And now it becomes necessary, for a better understanding of what is to follow, to mention with some degree of particularization the places and manners in which my three friends elected to take their sleep, as well as the condition and berth of the schooner _Idaho Lass_.

Hardenberg slept upon the quarterdeck, rolled up in an army blanket and a tarpaulin. Strokher turned in below in the cabin upon the fixed lounge by the dining-table, while Ally Bazan stretched himself in one of the bunks in the fo'c's'le.

As for the location of the schooner, she lay out in the stream, some three or four cables' length off the yards and docks of a ship-building concern. No other ship or boat of any description was anchored nearer than at least 300 yards. She was a fine, roomy vessel, three-masted, about 150 feet in length overall. She lay head up stream, and from where I lay by Hardenberg on the quarterdeck I could see her tops sharply outlined against the sky above the Golden Gate before I went to sleep.

I suppose it was very early in the morning--nearer two than three--when I awoke. Some movement on the part of Hardenberg--as I afterward found out--had aroused me. But I lay inert for a long minute trying to find out why I was not in my own bed, in my own home, and to account for the rushing, rippling sound of the tide eddies sucking and chuckling around the _Lass's_ rudder-post.

Then I became aware that Hardenberg was awake. I lay in my hammock, facing the stern of the schooner, and as Hardenberg had made up his bed between me and the wheel he was directly in my line of vision when I opened my eyes, and I could see him without any other movement than that of raising the eyelids. Just now, as I drifted more and more into wakefulness, I grew proportionately puzzled and perplexed to account for a singularly strange demeanour and conduct on the part of my friend.

He was sitting up in his place, his knees drawn up under the blanket, one arm thrown around both, the hand of the other arm resting on the neck and supporting the weight of his body. He was broad awake. I could see the green shine of our riding lantern in his wide-open eyes, and from time to time I could hear him muttering to himself, "What is it? What is it? What the devil is it, anyhow?" But it was not his attitude, nor the fact of his being so broad awake at the unseasonable hour, nor yet his unaccountable words, that puzzled me the most. It was the man's eyes and the direction in which they looked that startled me.

His gaze was directed not upon anything on the deck of the boat, nor upon the surface of the water near it, but upon something behind me and at a great height in the air. I was not long in getting myself broad awake.

III

I rolled out on the deck and crossed over to where Hardenberg sat huddled in his blankets.

"What the devil--" I began.

He jumped suddenly at the sound of my voice, then raised an arm and

pointed toward the top of the foremast.

"D'ye see it?" he muttered. "Say, huh? D'ye see it? I thought I saw it last night, but I wasn't sure. But there's no mistake now. D'ye see it, Mr. Dixon?"

I looked where he pointed. The schooner was riding easily to anchor, the surface of the bay was calm, but overhead the high white sea-fog was rolling in. Against it the foremast stood out like the hand of an illuminated town clock, and not a detail of its rigging that was not as distinct as if etched against the sky.

And yet I saw nothing.

"Where?" I demanded, and again and again "where?"

"In the crosstrees," whispered Hardenberg. "Ah, look there."

He was right. Something was stirring there, something that I had mistaken for the furled tops'l. At first it was but a formless bundle, but as Hardenberg spoke it stretched itself, it grew upright, it assumed an erect attitude, it took the outlines of a human being. From head to heel a casing housed it in, a casing that might have been anything at that hour of the night and in that strange place--a shroud, if you like, a winding-sheet--anything; and it is without shame that I confess to a creep of the most disagreeable sensation I have ever known as I stood at Hardenberg's side on that still, foggy night and watched the stirring of that nameless, formless shape standing gaunt and tall and grisly and wrapped in its winding-sheet upon the crosstrees of the foremast of the _Idaho Lass_.

We watched and waited breathless for an instant. Then the creature on the foremast laid a hand upon the lashings of the tops'l and undid them. Then it turned, slid to the deck by I know not what strange process, and, still hooded, still shrouded, still lapped about by its mummy-wrappings, seized a rope's end. In an instant the jib was set and stood on hard and billowing against the night wind. The tops'l followed. Then the figure moved forward and passed behind the companionway of the fo'c's'le.

We looked for it to appear upon the other side, but looked in vain. We saw it no more that night.

What Hardenberg and I told each other between the time of the disappearing and the hour of breakfast I am now ashamed to recall. But at last we agreed to say nothing to the others--for the time being. Just after breakfast, however, we two had a few words by the wheel on the quarterdeck. Ally Bazan and Strokher were forward.

"The proper thing to do," said I--it was a glorious, exhilarating morning, and the sunlight was flooding every angle and corner of the schooner--"the proper thing to do is to sleep on deck by the foremast to-night with our pistols handy and interview the--party if it walks again."

"Oh, yes," cried Hardenberg heartily. "Oh, yes; that's the proper thing. Of course it is. No manner o' doubt about that, Mr. Dixon. Watch for the party--yes, with pistols. Of course it's the proper thing. But I know one man that ain't going to do no such thing."

"Well," I remember to have said reflectively, "well--I guess I know another."

But for all our resolutions to say nothing to the others about the night's occurrences, we forgot that the tops'l and jib were both set and both drawing.

"An' w'at might be the bloomin' notion o' setting the bloomin' kite and jib?" demanded Ally Bazan not half an hour after breakfast. Shamelessly Hardenberg, at a loss for an answer, feigned an interest in the grummets of the life-boat cover and left me to lie as best I might.

But it is not easy to explain why one should raise the sails of an anchored ship during the night, and Ally Bazan grew very suspicious. Strokher, too, had something to say, and in the end the whole matter came out.

Trust a sailor to give full value to anything savouring of the supernatural. Strokher promptly voted the ship a "queer old hooker anyhow, and about as seaworthy as a hen-coop." He held forth at great length upon the subject.

"You mark my words, now," he said. "There's been some fishy doin's in this 'ere vessel, and it's like somebody done to death crool hard, an' 'e wants to git away from the smell o' land, just like them as is killed on blue water. That's w'y 'e takes an' sets the sails between dark an' dawn."

But Ally Bazan was thoroughly and wholly upset, so much so that at first he could not speak. He went pale and paler while we stood talking it over, and crossed himself--he was a Catholic--furtively behind the water-butt.

"I ain't never 'a' been keen on ha'nts anyhow, Mr. Dixon," he told me aggrievedly at dinner that evening. "I got no use for 'em. I ain't never known any good to come o' anything with a ha'nt tagged to it, an' we're

makin' a ill beginnin' o' this island business, Mr. Dixon--a blyme ill beginnin'. I mean to stye awyke to-night."

But if he was awake the little colonial was keeping close to his bunk at the time when Strokher and Hardenberg woke me at about three in the morning.

I rolled out and joined them on the quarterdeck and stood beside them watching. The same figure again towered, as before, gray and ominous in the crosstrees. As before, it set the tops'l; as before, it came down to the deck and raised the jib; as before, it passed out of sight amid the confusion of the forward deck.

But this time we all ran toward where we last had seen it, stumbling over the encumbered decks, jostling and tripping, but keeping wonderfully close together. It was not twenty seconds from the time the creature had disappeared before we stood panting upon the exact spot we had last seen it. We searched every corner of the forward deck in vain. We looked over the side. The moon was up. This night there was no fog. We could see for miles each side of us, but never a trace of a boat was visible, and it was impossible that any swimmer could have escaped the merciless scrutiny to which we subjected the waters of the bay in every direction.

Hardenberg and I dived down into the fo'c's'le. Ally Bazan was sound asleep in his bunk and woke stammering, blinking and bewildered by the lantern we carried.

"I sye," he cried, all at once scrambling up and clawing at our arms, "D'd the bally ha'nt show up agyne?" And as we nodded he went on more aggrievedly than ever--"Oh, I sye, y' know, I daon't like this. I eyen't shipping in no bloomin' 'ooker wot carries a ha'nt for supercargo. They waon't no good come o' this cruise--no, they waon't. It's a sign, that's wot it is. I eyen't goin' to buck again no signs--it eyen't human nature, no it eyen't. You mark my words, 'Bud' Hardenberg, we clear this port with a ship wot has a ha'nt an' we waon't never come back agyne, my hearty."

That night he berthed aft with us on the quarterdeck, but though we stood watch and watch till well into the dawn, nothing stirred about the foremast. So it was the next night, and so the night after that. When three successive days had passed without any manifestation the keen edge of the business became a little blunted and we declared that an end had been made.

Ally Bazan returned to his bunk in the fo'c's'le on the fourth night, and the rest of us slept the hours through unconcernedly.

But in the morning there were the jib and tops'l set and drawing as before.

IV

After this we began experimenting--on Ally Bazan. We bunked him forward and we bunked him aft, for some one had pointed out that the "ha'nt" walked only at the times when the colonial slept in the fo'c's'le. We found this to be true. Let the little fellow watch on the quarterdeck with us and the night passed without disturbance. As soon as he took up his quarters forward the haunting recommenced. Furthermore, it began to appear that the "ha'nt" carefully refrained from appearing to him. He of us all had never seen the thing. He of us all was spared the chills and the harrowings that laid hold upon the rest of us during these still gray hours after midnight when we huddled on the deck of the _Idaho Lass_ and watched the sheeted apparition in the rigging; for by now there was no more charging forward in attempts to run the ghost down. We had passed that stage long since.

But so far from rejoicing in this immunity or drawing courage therefrom, Ally Bazan filled the air with his fears and expostulations. Just the fact that he was in some way differentiated from the others--that he was singled out, if only for exemption--worked upon him. And that he was unable to scale his terrors by actual sight of their object excited them all the more.

And there issued from this a curious consequence. He, the very one who had never seen the haunting, was also the very one to unsettle what little common sense yet remained to Hardenberg and Strokher. He never allowed the subject to be ignored--never lost an opportunity of referring to the doom that o'erhung the vessel. By the hour he poured into the ears of his friends lugubrious tales of ships, warned as this one was, that had cleared from port, never to be seen again. He recalled to their minds parallel incidents that they themselves had heard; he foretold the fate of the _Idaho Lass_ when the land should lie behind and she should be alone in midocean with this horrid supercargo that took liberties with the rigging, and at last one particular morning, two days before that which was to witness the schooner's departure, he came out flatfooted to the effect that "Gaw-blyme him, he couldn't stand the gaff no longer, no he couldn't, so help him, that if the owners were wishful for to put to sea" (doomed to some unnamable destruction) "he for one wa'n't fit to die, an' was going to quit that blessed day." For the sake of appearances, Hardenberg and Strokher blustered and fumed, but I could hear the crack in Strokher's voice as plain as in a broken ship's bell. I was not surprised at what happened later in the day, when he told the others that he was a very sick man. A congenital stomach trouble, it seemed--or was it liver complaint--had found him out again.

He had contracted it when a lad at Trincomalee, diving for pearls; it was acutely painful, it appeared. Why, gentlemen, even at that very moment, as he stood there talking--Hi, yi! O Lord !--talking, it was a-griping of him something uncommon, so it was. And no, it was no manner of use for him to think of going on this voyage; sorry he was, too, for he'd made up his mind, so he had, to find out just what was wrong with the foremast, etc.

And thereupon Hardenberg swore a great oath and threw down the capstan bar he held in his hand.

"Well, then," he cried wrathfully, "we might as well chuck up the whole business. No use going to sea with a sick man and a scared man."

"An' there's the first word o' sense," cried Ally Bazan, "I've heard this long day. 'Scared,' he says; aye, right ye are, me bully."

"It's Cy Rider's fault," the three declared after a two-hours' talk. "No business giving us a schooner with a ghost aboard. Scoovy or no scoovy, island or no island, guano or no guano, we don't go to sea in the haunted hooker called the _Idaho Lass_."

No more they did. On board the schooner they had faced the supernatural with some kind of courage born of the occasion. Once on shore, and no money could hire, no power force them to go aboard a second time.

The affair ended in a grand wrangle in Cy Rider's back office, and just twenty-four hours later the bark _Elftruda_, Captain Jens Petersen, cleared from Portland, bound for "a cruise to South Pacific ports--in ballast."

* * * * *

Two years after this I took Ally Bazan with me on a duck-shooting excursion in the "Toolies" back of Sacramento, for he is a handy man about a camp and can row a boat as softly as a drifting cloud.

We went about in a cabin cat of some thirty feet over all, the rowboat towing astern. Sometimes we did not go ashore to camp, but slept aboard. On the second night of this expedient I woke in my blankets on the floor of the cabin to see the square of gray light that stood for the cabin door darkened by--it gave me the same old start--a sheeted figure. It was going up the two steps to the deck. Beyond question it had been in the cabin. I started up and followed it. I was too frightened not to--if you can see what I mean. By the time I had got the blankets off and had thrust my head above the level of the cabin hatch the figure was already in the bows, and, as a matter of course, hoisting the jib.

I thought of calling Ally Bazan, who slept by me on the cabin floor, but it seemed to me at the time that if I did not keep that figure in sight it would elude me again, and, besides, if I went back in the cabin I was afraid that I would bolt the door and remain under the bedclothes till morning. I was afraid to go on with the adventure, but I was much more afraid to go back.

So I crept forward over the deck of the sloop. The "ha'nt" had its back toward me, fumbling with the ends of the jib halyards. I could hear the creak of new ropes as it undid the knot, and the sound was certainly substantial and commonplace. I was so close by now that I could see every outline of the shape. It was precisely as it had appeared on the crosstrees of the _Idaho_, only, seen without perspective, and brought down to the level of the eye, it lost its exaggerated height.

It had been kneeling upon the deck. Now, at last, it rose and turned about, the end of the halyards in its hand. The light of the earliest dawn fell squarely on the face and form, and I saw, if you please, Ally Bazan himself. His eyes were half shut, and through his open lips came the sound of his deep and regular breathing.

At breakfast the next morning I asked, "Ally Bazan, did you ever walk in your sleep."

"Aye," he answered, "years ago, when I was by wye o' being a lad, I used allus to wrap the bloomin' sheets around me. An' crysy things I'd do the times. But the 'abit left me when I grew old enough to tyke me whisky strite and have hair on me fyce."

I did not "explain away" the ghost in the crosstrees either to Ally Bazan or to the other two Black Crows. Furthermore, I do not now refer to the Island of Paa in the hearing of the trio. The claims and title of Norway to the island have long since been made good and conceded--even by the State Department at Washington--and I understand that Captain Petersen has made a very pretty fortune out of the affair.

FLOWERS OF PARADISE

from *Country Neighbors*, by Alice Brown
eBook #24540

Hetty Niles, with a sudden distaste for her lonely kitchen, its bare cleanliness the more revealed by the February sun, caught her shawl from the nail and threw it over her head. She spoke aloud, in a way she had taken up within the last week, while her solitude was still vocal with notes out of the living past:--

"I'll go over an' see Still Lucy."

Her dry face, hardened to all weathers, wore a look of anguish, an emotion that smoldered in the hollows about the eyes, and was tensely drawn around the mouth. She was like one of the earth-forces, or an earth-servitor, scarred by work and trouble, and yet so unused to patience that when it was forced upon her she felt suffocated by it. She hurried out into the fitful weather, and closed her door behind her. With her shawl hugged closely, she took the path across the fields, a line of dampness in the spongy turf, and, head down, made her way steadily to the little white house where Still Lucy, paralyzed for over thirty years, lay on the sofa, knitting lace. Hetty walked into this kitchen with as little ceremony as she had used in leaving her own. She withdrew the shawl from her head, saying, in the act,--

"How do, Lucy?"

The woman looked up from her work, and nodded brightly. To the casual eye she was not of a defined age. Her face was unwrinkled and its outline delicate, and her blue eyes were gay with even a childish pleasure. She looked invitingly at the world, as if it could give her nothing undesired. Yet the soft hair rising in a crown from her forehead was white as silver, and her little hands were old. She was covered to the waist with a cheerful quilt. Her fingers went in and out unceasingly upon her work, while her bright glance traveled about the room. The stove gave out the moist heat of a kitchen fire where the pot is boiling, and the cat cocked a sleepy eye in the sun. Hetty seated herself by the stove, and stretched her hand absently toward its warmth.

"Parson's be'n in," she said abruptly.

"Caroline said so," returned Lucy, in her sweet, husky old voice. "I thought likely."

"He says I must be resigned," continued Hetty, with the same brusque emphasis.

"Oh, yes!" said Lucy. She spoke as if it were a task to be accepted gratefully.

"To the will o' God. 'Parson,' says I, 'I don't believe in God.'"

Lucy's fingers caught out a tangle in her thread, while her delicate brow knotted itself briefly.

"Ain't that hard!" she breathed.

Hetty was brooding over the fire.

"That's what I told him," she went on. "An' I don't. I don't know 's ever I did, to speak of. It never really come up till now. He repeated texts o' Scriptur'. 'Parson,' says I, 'you ain't a woman that had one son, as good a boy as ever stepped, an' then lost him. 'Tain't a week,' says I, 'sence he was carried out o' this house. Don't you talk to me about God.'"

Lucy was looking at her with eloquent responses in her face. Hetty glanced up, and partly understood them.

"Nor you neither, Lucy," she made haste to say. "You're terrible pious, an' you've had your troubles, an' they've be'n heavy; but you ain't had an' lost. If I could take it on me to-day to lay there as you be, knowin' I shouldn't get up no more, I'd jump at it if I could have Willard back, whistlin' round an' cuttin' up didos. Yes, I would."

"I guess you would," murmured Lucy to herself. "It's too bad--too bad."

There was a step on the doorstone, and Caroline came in. She was Lucy's sister, gaunt and dark-eyed, with high cheek-bones, and the red of health upon them. She regarded Hetty piercingly.

"You got company over to your house?" she asked at once.

"No," Hetty answered. She added bitterly, "It's stiller'n the grave. I don't expect company no more."

"Well," commented Caroline.

She had laid aside her shawl, and began fruitful sallies about the kitchen, putting in a stick of wood, catching off the lid from the pot, to regard the dinner with a frowning brow, and then sitting down to extricate from her pocket a small something rolled in her handkerchief.

"I've be'n into Mis' Flood's," she said, "an' she gi'n me this." She

walked over to her sister, bearing the treasure with a joyous pride. "It's as nice a slip o' rose geranium as ever I see."

Hetty's face contracted sharply.

"I've throwed away the flowers," she said.

Both sisters glanced at her in sympathetic knowledge. Caroline was busily setting out the slip in a side of the calla pot, and she got a tumbler to cover it.

"Them parson's wife sent over?" she asked.

Hetty nodded. "There was a dozen of 'em," she continued, with pride, "white carnation pinks."

"She sent way to Fairfax for 'em," said Caroline. "Her girl told me. Handsome, wa'n't they?"

"They wa'n't no handsomer'n what come from round here," said Hetty jealously, "not a mite. There you sent over your calla, an' Mis' Flood cut off that long piece o' German ivy, an' the little Ballard gal,--nothin' would do but she must pick all them gloxinias an' have 'em for Willard's funeral. I didn't hardly know there was so many flowers in the world, in winter time." She mused a moment, her face fallen into grief. Then she roused herself. "What'd you mean by askin' if I had company?" she interrogated Caroline.

"Nothin', on'y they say Susan's boy's round here."

"Susan's boy? From out West?"

Caroline nodded.

"He was into Mis' Flood's yesterday," she said, "inquirin' all about you. Said he hadn't seen you sence he was a little feller. Said he shouldn't hardly dast to call, now you an' his mother wa'n't on terms. Seems 's if he knew all about that trouble over the land."

Hetty's face lighted scornfully.

"Trouble over the land!" she echoed. "Who made the trouble? That's what I want to know--who made it? Susan Hill May, that's who made it. You needn't look at me, Lucy. I ain't pious, as you be, an' I don't care if she is my step-sister. You know how 'twas, as well as I do. Mother left me the house because I was a widder an' poor as poverty, an' she left Susan the pastur'. 'Twas always understood I was to pastur' my cow in that pastur', Susan livin' out West an' all, an' I always had, sence

Benjamin died; but the minute mother left me the house, Susan May set up her Ebenezer I shouldn't have the use o' that pastur'. She's way out West there, an' she don't want it; but she'd see it sunk ruther'n I should have the good on 't."

"Well," said Lucy soothingly, "you ain't pastur'd there sence she forbid it."

"No, I guess I ain't," returned Hetty, rising to go. "Nor I ain't set foot in it. What's Mis' Flood say about Susan's boy?" she asked abruptly, turning to Caroline.

"Well,"--Caroline hesitated,--"she said he was in liquor when he called, an' she heard he'd be'n carryin' on some over to the Street."

Hetty nodded grimly. She spoke with an exalted sadness.

"I ain't surprised. Susan drove her husband to drink, an' she'd drive a saint. Well, my Willard was as good a boy as ever stepped. That's all I got to say."

The sisters had exchanged according glances, and Caroline asked:--

"Stay an' set down with us? It's b'iled dish. I guess you can smell it."

Hetty was drawing her shawl about her. She shook her head.

"No," said she. "'Bleeged to ye. I'll pick up suthin'."

But later, entering her own kitchen, she stopped and drew a sharp breath, like an outcry against the desolation there. The room was in its homely order, to be broken, she felt, no more. She was childless. All the zest of work had gone. She threw off her shawl then, with a savage impatience at her own grief, and began her tasks. In the midst of them she paused, laid down her cooking-spoon, and sank into a chair.

"O Lord!" she moaned. "My Lord!" This was the worst of all the days since he had died. She understood it now. The flowers were gone. They had formed a link between the present and that day when they made the sitting-room so sweet. Even the fragrance of that last sad hour had fled. Suddenly she laughed, a bitter note. She spoke aloud:--

"If the Lord'll send me some flowers afore to-morrer night, I'll believe in Him. If He'll send me one flower or a sprig o' green, I'll believe in Him, an' hold up my head rejoicin', like Still Lucy."

She repeated the words, as if to One who heard. Thereafter a quickened

energy possessed her. She got her dinner alertly, and with some vestige of the interest she had been used to feel when she cooked for two. All the afternoon it was the same. Her mind dwelt passionately upon the compact she had offered the Unseen. Over and over she repeated the terms of it, sometimes with eager commentary.

"It can't hurt nobody," she reasoned, in piteous argument. Her gnarled hands trembled as she worked, and now, with nobody to note her weakness, tears fell unregarded down her face. "There's things I wouldn't ask for, whether or no. Mebbe they'd have to be took away from somebody else; an' I never was one to plead up poverty. But there's plenty o' flowers in the world. 'Twouldn't upset nothin' for me to have jest one afore to-morrer night. If I can have one flower afore to-morrer night, I shall know there's a God in heaven."

The day began with a sense of newness and exaltation at which she wondered. Until this hour, death had briefly ruled the house and chilled the air in it. Her son's overthrow had struck at the heart of her vitality and presaged her own swift doom. All lesser interests had dwindled and grown poor; her life seemed flickering out like a taper in the breeze. Now grief had something to leaven it. Something had set up a screen between her and the wind of unmerciful events. There was a possibility, not of reprieve, but of a message from the unseen good, and for a moment the candle of her life burned steadily. Since the dead could not return, stricken mortality had one shadowy hope: that it should go, in its course, to them, and find them living. Again she vowed her belief to the God who would send one sign of his well-wishing toward her.

"I'll set till twelve o'clock this night," she said grimly, laying her morning fire. "That's eighteen hours. If He can't do suthin' in eighteen hours, He can't ever do it."

At ten o'clock her work was done, and she established herself by the sitting-room window, her knitting in hand, to watch for him who was to come. A warm excitement flooded through her veins.

"How my heart beats!" she said aloud. It had hurried through the peril of Willard's illness and the disaster of his death. It was hurrying now, as if it meant to gallop with her from the world.

At half-past ten there was the sound of wheels. She dropped her knitting and put her hand up to her throat. A carriage turned the bend in the road and passed the clump of willows. It was the minister's wife, driving at a good pace and leaning out to bow. Hetty rose, trembling, her hand on the window-sill. But the minister's wife gave another smiling nod and flicked the horse. She was not the messenger.

Hetty sank back to her work, and knit with trembling fingers. The forenoon wore on. It was Candlemas, and cloudy, and she remembered that the badger would not go back into his hole. There would be an early spring. Then grief caught her again by the throat, at the thought that spring might come, and summer greaten, but she was a stricken woman whose joy would not return. She rose from her chair and called out passionately,--

"Only one flower, jest one sprig o' suthin', an' I'll be contented!"

That day she had no dinner. She made it ready, with a scrupulous exactitude, but she could not eat. She went back to her post at the window. Nobody went by. Of all the neighbors who might have driven to market, not one appeared. Life itself seemed to be stricken from her world. At four o'clock she caught her shawl from its nail, and ran across the field to Lucy. Both sisters were at home, in the still tranquillity of their pursuits, Lucy knitting and Caroline binding shoes. Hetty came in upon them as if a wind had blown her.

"Law me!" said Caroline, looking up. "Anything happened?"

"No," said Hetty, "nothin' 's happened. I don't know as 't ever will."

She sat down and talked recklessly about nothing. A calla bud, yesterday a roll of white, had opened, and the sun lay in its heart. Hetty set her lips grimly, and refused to look at it. Yet, as her voice rang on, the feverish will within her kept telling her what she might say. She might ask for the well-being of the slip set out yesterday, or she might even venture, "I should think you'd move your calla out o' the sun. Won't it wilt the bloom?" Then Lucy might tell Caroline to snip off the bloom and give it to her. But no one spoke of plants. Her breath quickened chokingly, and her heart swelled and made her sick. Suddenly she rose and threw her shawl about her in wild haste.

"I must go," she trembled; but at the door Lucy stayed her.

"Hetty," she called. Her voice faltered, and her eyes looked soft under wistful brows. "Hetty!"

Hetty was waiting, in a tremor of suspense.

"Well," she answered, her voice beating upon the word. "What is it?"

Still Lucy spoke with diffidence, as she always did when she touched upon her faith.

"I was only thinkin'--I dunno 's I can tell you, Hetty--but what you said yesterday, you know, about not believin' there's any God--I was

goin' to ask you who you think made the trees an' flowers."

Hetty did not answer. She stood there, her hands trembling underneath her shawl. She gripped them, one upon the other, to keep from stretching them for alms.

"Well," she answered harshly. "Well!"

"Well," said Lucy gently, "that's all."

Hetty laughed out stridently.

"I'm goin' over to Mis' Flood's," said she, her hand upon the latch.

"They've driv' over to Fairfax to spend the day," volunteered Caroline. "Better by half set here."

"Then I'm goin' over to Ballard's." She fled down the road so fast that Caroline, watching her compassionately, remarked that she "looked, as if she's sent for," and Lucy said, like a charm, a phrase of the Lord's Prayer.

Hetty looked up at the Floods' and groaned, remembering there were plants within. She spoke aloud, satirically:--

"Mebbe I could be the instrument o' the Lord. Mebbe if I climbed into the winder, an' stole a bloom, I could say He give it to me."

But she went on, and hurried up the path to the little one-story house where the Ballards lived. Grandsir was by the fire, pounding walnuts in a little wooden mortar, to make a paste for his toothless jaws, and little 'Melia, a bowl of nuts before her, sat in a high chair at the table, lost in reckless greed. Her doll, forgotten, lay across a corner of the table, in limp abandon, the buttonholed eyes staring nowhere. Grandsir spoke wheezingly:--

"We're keepin' house, 'Melia an' me. We thought we'd crack us a few nuts. Help yourself, Hetty."

'Melia lifted her bowl with two fat hands, and held it out, tiltingly. Her round blue eyes shone in a painstaking hospitality. She was a good little 'Melia.

"No, dear, you set it down. I don't want none," said Hetty tenderly. She steadied the bowl on its way back, and 'Melia, relinquishing the claims of entertainment, picked into her small mouth with a swift avidity.

"Clever little creatur'!" Hetty continued, in a frank aside.

But Grandsir had not heard.

"How old was Willard?" he inquired, pausing to test the mass his mortar held.

The tears came into her eyes.

"Thirty-four," she answered.

"How old?"

After she had repeated it, 'Melia turned suddenly, and made a solemn statement.

"I picked off my gloxinias and gave 'em all to Willard." She lisped on the name, and made it a funny flower.

Hetty was trembling.

"Yes, dear, yes," she responded prayerfully. "They were real handsome blooms. I was obleeged to ye." She wondered if the lisping mouth would say, "There's another one open," and the fat hand pluck it for her. She shut her lips and tried to seal her mind, lest the child should be prompted and the test should fail.

"I dunno 's I remember what year Willard's father died?" Grandsir was inquiring.

"O Lord!" breathed Hetty, "I can't bear no more."

She threw her shawl over her head, and hurried out.

"Come again," the childish voice called after her.

Grandsir had begun to eat his nuts. He scarcely knew she had been there.

Hetty went swiftly homeward through the dusk. The damp air was clogging to the breath, and for a moment her warm kitchen seemed a refuge to her. But only for a moment. It was very still.

"I'll give it up," she said. "There's flowers in the world, an' not one for me. I might 'a' had 'em if He'd took the trouble to send. That proves it. There ain't anybody to send,--nor care."

She walked about in a grim scorn of everything: the world, the way it was made, and herself for trusting it. When she had made a cup of tea and broken bread, the warmth came back to her chilled heart, and

suddenly her scorn turned against herself.

"I said I'd wait till twelve o'clock to-night," she owned. "I'm the one that's petered out. This is the last word I speak till arter twelve."

She fortified herself with stronger tea, and sat grimly down to knit. The minutes and the half-hours passed. She rose, from time to time, and fed the fire, and once, at eleven, when a cold rain began, she put her face to the pane.

"Dark as pitch!" she muttered. "If anybody's comin', they couldn't see their way."

Then she lighted another lamp and set it in the window. It was a quarter before twelve when her trembling hands failed her, and she laid down her knitting and walked to the front door. The northeast wind whipped her in the face, and she could hear the surf at Breakers' Edge. The pathway of light from the window lay upon a figure by the gate. A voice came out of the stillness. It was young and frank.

"I'm holdin' up your fence, to rest a spell. I've given my ankle a twist somehow."

Hetty ran out into the storm, and the wind lashed strands of hair into her eyes. She stretched a hand over the fence, and laid it on the man's shoulder.

"Who be you?" she demanded.

He laughed.

"I'll tell you, if you won't bat me for it. I'm your own nephew, near as I can make out."

"Susan's son?"

"Yes. Much as my life's worth, ain't it? Never saw anything like you an' mother when you get fightin',--reg'lar old barnyard fowls."

She gripped his shoulder tightly. Her voice had a sob in it, and a prayer.

"You got anything for me?"

He answered wonderingly.

"Why, no, I don't know 's I have. My ankle's busted, that's all. I guess I can crawl along in a minute."

She remembered how fast the clock was getting on toward midnight, and spoke in dull civility.

"You come in. I'll bandage ye up. Mebbe 'twill save ye a sprain."

Later, when he was by the fire and she had done skillful work with water and cotton cloth, and the pain would let him, he looked at her again.

"You an' mother ain't no more alike than a black an' a maltee," he said. "Hullo! what you cryin' for?"

The tears were splashing her swift hands.

"I dunno," she answered shortly. "Yes, I do, too. You speak some like Willard."

The clock was striking two when she went to bed, and she slept at once. It was necessary, she told herself. There was a man in the west room, and his ankle was hurt, and she must get up early to call the doctor.

The next day and the next went like moments of a familiar dream. The doctor came, and the boy--he was twenty-six, but he seemed only a boy--joked while he winced, and owned he had nothing to do, and could easily lie still a spell, if aunt Het would keep him. She was sorry over the hurt, and, knowing no other compensation for a man's idleness, began to cook delicate things for his eating. He laughed at everything, even at her when she was too solicitous. But he was sorry for her, and when she spoke of Willard his face softened. She thought sometimes of what she had heard about him before he came; and one April day, when they were out in the yard together, he leaning on his cane and she sweeping the grass, she spoke involuntarily:--

"I can't hardly believe it."

"What?" he asked.

"Folks said"--she hesitated--"folks said you was a drinkin' man."

He laughed out.

"I did get overtaken," he owned. "I was awful discouraged, the night I struck here. I didn't care whether school kept or not. But 'twas Lew Parker's whiskey," he added, twinkling at her. "That whiskey'd poison a rat."

She paused, with a handful of chips gathered from the clean grass.

"What was you discouraged about?" she asked kindly.

"Well,"--he hesitated,--"I may as well tell you. I've invented somethin'. It goes onto a reaper. Mother never believed in it, an' she turned me down. So I came East. I couldn't get anybody to look at it, an' I was pretty blue. Then the same day I busted my ankle I heard from another man, an' he'll buy it an' take all the risk, an'--George! I guess mother'll sing small when Johnnie comes marchin' home!"

He looked so strong and full of hope that her own sorrow cried, and her face worked piteously.

"You goin' back?" she faltered.

"Sometime, aunt Het. 'Long towards fall, maybe, to get things into shape. Then I'm comin' back again, to put it through. Who's that?"

It was a neighbor, stopping his slumberous horse to leave a letter.

"That's Susan's hand," said Hetty, as she gave it to him.

He read it and laughed a little. His eyes were moist.

"See here, aunt Het," he said, "mother's had a change of heart because I busted my ankle an' you took care of me an' all,--an' look here! she says she wants you should use the long pastur'."

Hetty dropped her apron and the chips it held. She stood silent for a moment, looking out over the meadow and wishing Willard knew. Then she said practically,--

"Soon 's your ankle'll bear ye, we'll poke down there an' see how things seem."

In a week's time they went slowly down to look over the fences, preparatory to turning in the cow. Hetty glanced at the sky, with its fleece of flying cloud, and then at the grass, so bright that the eyes marveled at it. The old ache was keen within her. The earth bereft of her son would never be the same earth again, but some homely comforting had reached her with the springing of the leaf. She looked at the boy by her side. He was a pretty boy, she thought, and she was glad Susan had him. And suddenly it came to her that he had been lent her for a little while, and she was glad of that, too. His hurt had kept her busy. His ways about the house, even the careless ones, had strengthened the grief in her, but in a human, poignant way that had no bitterness.

They went about, testing the fence-lengths, and then, before they left the pasture, stood, by according impulse, and looked back into its

trembling green. The boy had let down the bars, but he was loath to go.

"Stop a minute," he said, pointing to an upland bank where the sun lay warm. "I'm tired."

"Lazy, more like," said Hetty. But he knew she said it fondly.

He lay down at full length, and she sank stiffly on the bank and leaned her elbow there. She looked at the sky and then at the bank. It was blue with violets. There were so many of them that, as they traveled up the sod, they made a purple stain.

"Well, aunt Het," said he, "you've got the pastur'."

She nodded.

"Don't make much difference how long you wait," he continued, "if it comes at last." He was thinking of his patent, and Hetty knew it.

"Mebbe we can't have things when we expect to," she answered comprehendingly. "Still Lucy's great on that. 'Don't do no good to set up your Ebenezer,' says she. 'You got to wait for things to grow.' Lucy's dretful pious." She passed her brown hands over the violet heads, as gently as a breeze, caressing but not bending them. "I dunno 's ever I see so many vi'lets afore."

"Like 'em, aunt Het?" he asked her kindly.

"I guess I do!" but as she spoke, her eyes widened in awe and wonder. "My Lord!" she breathed. "They're flowers."

The boy laughed.

"What'd you think they were?" he asked, with the same indulgent interest. "Herd's grass?"

He turned over and buried his sleepy visage in the new leaves. But Hetty was communing with herself. Her old face had a look of hushed solemnity. Her eyes were lighted from within.

"Sure enough," she murmured reverently. "They're flowers."

MINKA.

from *A Divided Heart and Other Stories*, by Paul Heyse
Translator: Constance Stewart Copeland EBook #34102

It was a few years after the French war. The fall review had incidentally brought together again a number of young officers who had earned their iron crosses in the array of the Loire, and they had invited good comrades from other regiments to join them and celebrate the reunion from an inexhaustible bowl. Midnight was past. The talk, which for some time had concerned personal recollections and experiences, had taken a thoughtful turn and was becoming profound. It was impossible to realize how many were absent without touching on the everlasting riddle of human life. Besides, the horrible death of a popular young hero, who had fallen into the hands of the Franc-tireurs, and been killed in the most revolting manner, and the consequent destruction of a treasure of brilliant gifts and talents, hopes and promises--had brought again to the front the old problem, whether universal destiny and the fate of the individual will be according to our idea of justice; or whether the individual's weal or woe will be quietly subordinated to the vast, mysterious design of the universe. All the well-known reasons for and against a providence ruling morally and judging righteously, as human beings conceive it, were discussed again and again; and at length the oldest and most distinguished of the young soldiers formulated, from the animated argument, this result:--that even the most enthusiastic optimist, in face of the crying horrors to which poor humanity is exposed, cannot prove the existence of a compensating justice on earth; indeed, can only save his belief in a righteous God by hoping for a world to come.

"But will donkeys go to heaven, too?" suddenly asked a calm, rich voice from a quiet corner.

For a moment all were silent. Then followed an outburst of gay laughter, agreeably enlivening to the majority, who were tired of the philosophical talk.

"Hear! hear!" cried some.

"One will not be able to understand his own speech at doomsday if all the resurrected donkeys bray to one another," said a lively young captain. "Although, Eugene, if the sainted Antonius's pig is in heaven--"

"And so many pious sheep!" another broke in.

"You forget that the question is long since decided," said a third; "one has only to read Voltaire's 'Pucelle' in so many cantos!"

"Were you merely joking, Eugene?" then asked the senior president, who had not joined in the laugh, "or was the question seriously meant, because it is certainly not yet decided whether or no an immortal soul lives in animals also?"

The person thus addressed was a young man about thirty years of age, the only one at the banquet who wore civilian's dress. A severe wound had forced him to give up a military career. Since then he had lived on his small estate, more occupied with the study of military science than with the tilling of his fields. He had come to the city on the occasion of the review in order to see his old friends.

"The question," he now said very earnestly, "is really not my own, but is a quotation, whose brusque simplicity embarrassed me myself not long ago. A strange little story, certainly not a cheerful one, depends on it. But since we have again soared into speculations which are beyond jesting, it may perhaps be fitting if I tell where the quotation originated. I can hardly maintain that the story is calculated to throw any light on the dark problem."

"Only tell it," cried one after another.

"Who knows whether the donkey that you will ride before us may not finally open his mouth, like Balaam's prophetic ass, and teach us the system of the world."

Eugene shook his head with a peculiar smile, and began. "You know that I suffered from my wound during the entire winter of '71 and '72, and could only limp around with a cane. When spring came, I surrendered myself to the care of my married sister. My brother-in-law's manor is surrounded by endless pine forests, in which I was to take air baths. Whatever I gained in physical strength, as I wandered about each day in those lonely thickets, or lay lazily buried in cushions of deep, luxuriant moss, I lost again in my moral condition. Even in the hospital I had not seemed to myself such a miserable cripple as here. Everything about me was overflowing with life and strength; every old knot bore countless bright-green shoots; even a rotten stump made itself useful as barracks for a swarming army of ants--and I, condemned to detestable idleness at twenty-four--enough! I moped about half the time, and was on very bad terms with God and the world.

"About this time, too, I lived through a sickness which might have ended my brooding. The neighborhood is thinly populated; the people are very poor; the women frightfully ugly,--Bohemian types degenerated by

crossing with the Saxons, pinched and rendered half savage through privation and suffering. But I was perfectly contented that nothing charming crossed my path. It would have made the consciousness of my invalidism still more painful. You know, indeed, how long it takes for the last trace of the typhoid poison, so paralyzing to all energy, to disappear from one's system. The North Sea was to do me this service.

"Well, for several weeks, like mad Roland, though somewhat more mildly, I roamed through pine and fir-covered ravines without making a shot, although a hunting-piece was slung at my back. It was truly, in spite of all world-griefs, a heavenly time; never have I had such intimate acquaintance with nature, never felt so vividly what is meant by 'our mother earth' and 'our father air.' But that does not belong here. I will come to the point.

"One afternoon I allowed myself to be lured farther than usual from the house by a most beautiful path winding among young woods, whose slender trees, scarcely taller than I, allowed the May sunlight to stream through unchecked. When I found myself entirely astray, I decided to strike through to the edge of the forest, in order to regain an open view. A gentle slope, sparsely covered with birches and berry-bushes, led upwards. Beyond, through the tall firs which enclosed the clearing like a fence, I could see blue mountain-tops shimmering in the distance, and knew that I might thence easily find my way. But as I came out of the forest, I realized for the first time how far I had wandered. From the forest edge the land sank by a tolerably steep slope to a plain; and far below lay a small town, well known to me on the map, but so distant from our estate, that in all my reconnoitring I had never seen it till now. I was startled when I realized where I was, for, with my lame leg, I could not possibly undertake to return on foot. But I thought I might obtain a team in the village.

"I seated myself on a newly-fallen trunk to rest a little before descending to the town. The land beneath me lay in the deep calm of afternoon; thin clouds of smoke drifting up from the chimneys of the old houses announced that the good housewives were making their coffee. The broad, level plain, gayly checkered with fields of promising, green crops, stretched beyond; while almost exactly half way between the forest-edge and the first houses, and bordered by a few bushes and elders, lay a great fish-pond, peculiarly dark in color, although the purest spring-heaven was mirrored therein. The ground about it was marshy, and it seemed as though all the water of the neighborhood flowed into the depression as into some monstrous cistern. I do not know why the black basin appeared so uncanny to me, for the birds nesting in the shrubbery on its banks flew over it continually with cheerful twitterings. But my gloomy humor drew nourishment just then from the most innocent sources.

"When I finally raised my eyes to look about for some smooth, gradually-descending path, I noticed at the right, scarcely a stone's throw from my seat, a forlorn, mean little house standing in shadow close by the roots of the foremost trees. The old, tumbled-down fence surrounding a bit of ground; the dove-cot, in which no living thing was stirring; the tiled roof, whose damages had been poorly repaired with shingles and stones from the fields--all looked desolate and dilapidated, but since a path must surely lead thence to the town, I arose and dragged myself slowly towards the hut.

"As soon as I perceived the extreme desolation of the old barracks, I gave up my conjecture that a lumberman dwelt there. All the mortar had fallen away from the wall on the weather side, and the rain must have had free entrance through the holes in the deeply sunken roof. The piece of land behind the crumbling fence, which in times past might have supported a little garden or a few vegetable beds, had become a waste rubbish heap, upon which a single black hen tripped about, excitedly scratching between the weeds and nettles for something eatable. The north side, turned towards the slope, had two small windows with broken panes; and in the middle, a door standing wide open. I glanced into the unattractive entrance. No human being was to be seen or heard. I was about to go back and follow a little foot-path which seemed to wind down into the valley, when I was startled, indeed, truly frightened, by a donkey's bray; for never in my life have I heard that odd cry given so passionately, and with such peculiarly mournful modulation, as at that moment.

"The cry of pain came from the other side of the house. As I turned the corner, I saw in the meadow, close to the wall, an idyllic group crouched in the young grass: an old woman, clothed in a torn jacket of flowered calico and a coarse woollen petticoat, and wearing wound about her head a gray handkerchief, from beneath which her black hair, thickly sprinkled with gray, hung down in disorder; and near her, stretched upon the ground, a young donkey with noticeably slender limbs, dark-edged ears, and a coat of silver-gray, adorned on the back with a black stripe extending to the head. It was a fine animal, an honor to its race, and it would certainly have taken a prize at any show. But I immediately perceived why the poor creature relieved its oppressed heart in so particularly doleful a manner. A hand's-breadth on its left shoulder-blade was disfigured by a foul wound; this the old woman was attempting to cover with wet bandages, although the wounded brute restively tried to prevent her merciful ministrations with kicks and stampings of its forelegs. A shallow bowl by the woman's side held some dark liquid, with which she saturated the rag in order to cool the wound. She quietly continued this operation as I approached her.

"'Good-morning, dame!' said I. She merely nodded her head wearily. Beginning to speak of the wound, I asked how it had been received, and

what remedy she was using. No answer. It occurred to me that she did not understand German. But as I turned away, exclaiming half to myself, 'What a pity! Such a beautiful brute!' her gray eyes suddenly flashed so powerfully upon me from under her bushy, black brows, that the whole withered, leather-colored face seemed ten years younger.

"'Yes indeed, sir!' she said in notably pure German, with but a slight Bohemian accent. 'It is truly a pity, and Minka is certainly beautiful. If only you had seen her before she was hurt! She could jump about almost like a young horse, and her coat was like silk and velvet. Now, for seven months she has lain thus miserably on her belly, and if she gets up on her legs, how her knees bend, poor creature! Besides, what use is she? "Betty Lamitz," said the forest warder only yesterday, as he passed and saw the trouble I had with the brute--for now one must bring even its bit of fodder close to its muzzle--"you should have her killed," said he; "the skinner will give you a thaler for the hide." But no! said I; it's only a beast, but it shall have care like any other Christian being, or like an honest servant fallen sick in service! Yes, so I said. Whoa, whoa, Minka! don't roll about so! Look, sir, she lies on her back and rubs her wound all the time, so no plaster holds, and it spreads farther and farther. Whoa! Be still!'

"Then, fairly embracing the beast, she tried to quiet it, and keep it in its bed. Suddenly she released it, ran to a wooden well standing in shadow back of the house, and having filled a low pail from the old stone trough into which the water was trickling down, she thrust it under her charge's pink muzzle. Minka drank in long draughts, and her feverish excitement visibly abated. The old woman sat near her, looking on with great contentment, and seeming once more entirely oblivious to my presence.

"At length I repeated my inquiry as to the origin of the bad wound between the shoulder-blades. But the old woman again remained silent; she merely sighed, and scratched her lean arms with her withered lingers till white streaks stood up on the brown skin.

"'Yes, yes!' she said absently, after a long while--'such a poor female! What matters beauty against bad luck? And how she has worked, always cheerfully and willingly! I could load her as much as I wished, she never once kicked, or even shook her ears at me. To be sure, I have brought her up from her tenth day. She was a twin. The forester at Freithof had a she-ass that presented him one morning with Minka and her sister. "Would you like to have a handsome nursling, Mother Lamitz?" said he, just for a joke. Well, I held him to his word. He owed me a little gold for a piece of linen that I had woven for him. A couple of florins were still lacking, and for them I took the young ass. I had trouble enough, first in getting it home, and then in raising it, for milk was scarce with us. But we have never rued it. A

hard worker, sir, this Minka! We have had to drag many things from the woods, berries and mushrooms down to market in summer, then our winter wood, and whatsoever else was needful. I--good heavens! I can trace all my bones, although I am barely fifty, and Hannah--well, she was still too weak. And look you, such a faithful beast, a god-send, our only help--to be so hurt and disgraced in its young years--oh!'

"'Dame,' said I, 'look at me! I too am still young, yet I limp through the world, and my food must be brought to me because I can no longer gain it by my own strength; and whoever gives a thaler for _my_ hide is a fool and a spendthrift. Yet who knows, but that sometime we shall both prance gayly about once more.'

"I chatted in this strain for some time to cheer her, but, without heeding me, she stared fixedly at the wound. She had meanwhile covered it with a firm plaster, since the brute would no longer suffer the bathing.

"'Tell me once for all,' she suddenly commenced, and by the gleam of her eyes I saw that when young she must have been far from homely--'tell me once for all, sir, do you believe that donkeys go to heaven?'

"I laughed.

"Why do you ask that, mother?

"'I once asked our parson about it. He said it was a foolish question; that only Christian people go to heaven; and that animals have no immortal souls. "But, parson," said I, "if the great God is just and merciful, why doesn't He pity the beasts too, as human beings do if they are not scoundrels? For instance, why does Minka's sister live like a princess, have nothing to do but draw a little play-wagon in which the young masters take an occasional pleasure drive, always receive kind words and the best fodder, and even have a love-affair with the valley-miller's donkey? And our Minka, who has just as good a character, who wears herself out with work, and is often on her legs with a load for ten hours together, now has all four struck from under her, and if she should die to-morrow, what pleasure in life has she had? Is that just, parson? And if it is not sometime paid back to her there above--" But then he forbade me to speak, and said such blasphemy led straight to hell. You tell me, sir, do you know anything about it?'

"You can imagine that I did not have the most spirited expression, when the pistol was thus placed against my breast, and the explanation of the world-secret demanded of me. Fortunately, however, just at that moment a woman's clear voice began to sing within the house, and with it one heard a child's feeble crying, which the song was evidently

intended to still.

"'Who is singing there, Mother Lamitz?' I asked.

"'Who should it be but Hannah?' she grumbled.

"'Your daughter? May I venture to look in at her?'

"The old woman did not reply; muttering to herself, she took the pail and carried it back to the well; then she rolled forward a wheelbarrow piled high with grass and weeds, and busied herself in giving handfuls to the sick beast, almost shoving the food into its mouth. I did not wait long for an expressed permission, but approached the house, and, after knocking, entered by the door at the left.

"A suffocating steam greeted me, mixed with the smell of some drying clothes, which hung across the room on a tightly stretched rope. I saw immediately that there were only a few miserable swaddling-clothes and baby-frocks, coarse and much patched.

"In one corner stood a great loom, thickly covered with dust; in the other, upon a heap of straw, distinguishable from the bed of an animal only by a woollen covering, sat a fair-haired young woman, holding a half naked babe at her breast. She herself had nothing on her body but a shirt, which had fallen far down on her shoulders, and a red woollen petticoat, which left her white feet visible to the ankles.

"As I entered, she gazed at me searchingly, and for an instant ceased her singing. She seemed to have expected someone else; but, seeing that I was an entire stranger, she at once recommenced her cradle-song, though somewhat more softly, apparently not at all disturbed because I had surprised her in the performance of a mother's most sacred duty, and in such incomplete attire.

"As she sang she occasionally smiled at me, showing the pretty teeth in her large mouth; and I noticed that she clasped the child closer to her bared breast, and tried to draw the shirt up over her shoulders. Therewith a slight redness tinged her round, white face, and her blue eyes assumed a half imploring, half simple and dreamily vacant, expression.

"I excused myself for intruding; her mother had allowed me to come in; I would immediately go out again if she wished. She hummed her song without appearing to notice me; but from time to time she would suddenly lift her eyes, as if to see whether I were still there; then bite her full, red under-lip; rock the child back and forth; and, with her bare feet in the straw, beat time to her song.

"The child, which was but a few months old, had drunk and cried itself to sleep. The cradle-song grew ever softer; at length the young mother, kneeling down, wrapped the little one, which lay before her like some rosy, waxen doll, in a great woollen shawl. In the corner near the pillow I observed a little couch made of old rags and tatters. On this the baby was gently and carefully laid, and, in spite of the heat, covered yet again.

"Then the mother, always as if entirely alone in the room, began to let down and rebraid her tangled, yellow hair. The rest of her toilet seemed to be perfectly satisfactory.

"Indeed, no elegant costume could have displayed the poor young woman's charming figure to more advantage. The face was too like the old woman's to be considered pretty. Yet in the coloring and youthful contour of that round little head lay a charm, which was not lessened even by an evident trace of absent-mindedness, or downright imbecility. I felt intense sympathy for the poor, half-foolish creature, singing her lullaby so contentedly in such pitiable deprivation of all usual nursery comforts.

"She did not answer any of my questions even by a gesture. Since they had plenty of wood and did not grudge it, the oven was heated almost to bursting; although the air without was mild enough, even here on the windy height. So I did not wait until she finished arranging her heavy braids, but laid a shining thaler on the edge of the loom, nodded kindly to the harmless creature, and left the room.

"I found the old woman no longer by her sick darling, but at the well, where she was cleaning a handful of turnips and cutting them into a pot.

"'Mother Lamitz,' said I, 'you have a very pretty daughter. But she would not speak a word to me. Is she always so silent with strangers?'

"The old woman contracted her brows and stared gloomily at the pot which she held between her knees. In this attitude she might have served an artist as model for a witch preparing some noxious potion.

"'Silent?' she asked after a pause. 'No, sir; it is not her tongue that is lacking. When she will, she can chatter like a starling. The lack is above. She was so even as a child. Well, it was not such a great shame. If she had had the best sense, would that have helped a poor, fatherless thing like her? Did it matter to me that I had all my five senses right? I was cheated in spite of them, and therefore I care not a whit whether the brat to which she has given life takes after her, as people say, or after me. Either way, the little Mary will sometime become a mother on the sly, as it came into the world on the sly. It is

in the family, sir, it is in the family.'

"And then, after a pause, for I knew not what to say to this frank worldly wisdom--'Besides, the child will hardly grow old. Hannah treats it too foolishly. Indeed, reason has nothing to do with her actions. And when the winter comes, and we all must hunger--it is said, though, that God lets no sparrow fall from a roof without His will--I am curious to see whether He will trouble Himself about us four poor females up here.'

"Therewith she gazed pityingly at the donkey, which was now crouching quietly in its bedding. I could have laughed to see her so unconcernedly consider gray, long-eared Minka as the fourth in the family; but the horrible cold-bloodedness with which she spoke of her child and grandchild was not humorous.

"'You seem to care much more tenderly for the donkey than for your poor, little grandchild,' I said severely.

"She nodded her head calmly.

"'So it is,' she said; 'Minka needs me more. If I die to-day, she must come to a miserable end. Do you think Hannah would throw her even an armful of grass, although the poor beast can no longer seek it herself? No; she has no thought except for her baby, and beyond that, for the rascal who is its father. She waits for him every evening at sunset, although it is already a half year since he last crossed our threshold. And withal she is as happy as any one can wish to be, considers the dear God a good man, and lets her old mother do all the housework without any help. Why should I pity her or her brat? Both are already as if in heaven, and if it goes hard with them, and they must hunger and freeze, can they not make that good hereafter in Paradise? But Minka, look you, sir, has had no lover, and brought no young one into the world, and when she dies she will be thrown in the flaying-place, and on doomsday, when we other poor sinners gather our bones together, of her nothing at all will be left, and it will never be credited to her that she had a harder life than her twin sister. Look you, some other poor Christian mortal must pity the beasts if our Lord Jesus Himself cannot bring Himself to do it.'

"This logic allowed no reply. But I confess that the future of the little human being was more momentous to me, in spite of its immortal soul, than the question whether Minka would lose or not in the final distribution of justice. If to-morrow the only person among these 'four females' who had sound human sense should be struck by lightning, what would then become of the poor fool and her baby?

"'Does the father do nothing at all for the little one?' I asked at

last. 'The child is as beautiful as if carved out of ivory, and it is by no means certain that it will become like the mother. Has he never shown himself again?'

"'He!' exclaimed the old woman, thrusting the knife with which she had been cleaning the turnips deep into the wooden well-spout. 'If I should drag him to justice, he would swear himself free, that he would, although he is the town-judge's own son. Do you think I did not see it in him, even the first time when he came into our little house to kindle his pipe at the hearth--so he said, the villain! He is unfortunately as pretty to look at as he is bad within, and the stupid thing, Hannah she was still innocent, and I could let her wander all day long in the woods alone with Minka, filling the two panniers with berries and mushrooms--she thought of no man then, and I--God knows how it came about! Just because she is so foolish and weak in her head, I imagined that no one would trouble about her. But she pleased the judge's son, and was herself instantly carried away with him. After that I had trouble enough with her. She had worked bravely till then in the house and garden, and no work was too hard for her. Now, of a sudden, half the day her hands in her lap, and if I began to scold she would smile at me like a child waking from a lovely dream. If I sent her to the woods, she would bring the baskets back to the house scarcely a quarter full. It was Minka's misfortune too. You cannot believe, sir, how the beast clung to Hannah; it had human sense, anyway more than Hannah, and realized that the smart fellow with the black mustache had nothing good in mind. It always ran after the stupid girl, and gave a loud bray to warn her. I saw everything well enough, but what could I do? Scoldings and warnings were useless; she did not understand. And one cannot shut up a grown woman, who will use force to get out. She would have climbed from the window or even the chimney to rush into the very arms of ruin. Well, and so it happened. But the worst of it was that Minka suffered for it too. One evening she followed the girl into the woods, and soon afterward came limping home alone, with the wound in her neck, groaning and crying like a human being. Hannah came back an hour later. I questioned her closely as to how the brute had received the wound. "Ha!" said she, laughing insolently, "she screamed all the time and crowded between us, although Frank tried to drive her back with blows; so he suddenly became angry, drew his knife, and gave her a thrust." I struck the shameless thing for laughing about it, and put salve on the wound. But Minka rolled on her back as if crazy, and would bear no bandage, and so it has grown worse with her every day, and with Hannah too. Well, at least she has had her way, and nothing much better could have happened to her. Who would take one like her for his honest wife? And if sometime she realizes that it is useless to wait for her lover, and becomes crazy with grief at his wickedness, then she has little wit to lose. Whereas Minka, sir, who is cleverer than many people, believe me, she lies for days pondering why good and bad are so unequally divided on the earth;

why she has nothing but a ruined life, while her sister trots about elegant and happy; and why our good Lord did not arrange it so that donkeys might go to heaven, and obtain their reward for all the flaying and toiling, beating and kniving, they have to bear.'

"She uttered these last words with such violence that she was obliged to stop for breath. Then, brushing back the loose hairs at her neck, she tied her head-cloth more firmly, and took the pot of turnips on her arm.

"'I must go in, sir,' she said hoarsely, 'or I shall go to bed hungry. Do you know the town-judge and his fine son? It does not matter. He will not have to pay for what he did to my girl and to Minka until he stands before God's throne. And for the rest, why should his conscience prick him? She wished nothing better; indeed, we all wish nothing better; if we were not silly, you men could not be bad. So it will be as long as the world lasts. At doomsday I shall not complain of that, but I shall ask our Lord whether donkeys go to heaven too, of that you may be sure--of that you may certainly be sure!'

"She nodded her head vigorously, passed by without another look at me, and disappeared in the house.

"You can imagine that, as I descended the slope, passing the black water, and finally reaching the village, all that I had seen and heard continually pursued me. Even when I had secured a carriage at the inn, and was rolling along the highway towards my brother-in-law's house, the figure of the old woman, and especially that of her blonde daughter with the naked babe clasped to her breast, seemed actually before my eyes. It chanced that my driver was an elderly man, who could give trustworthy answers to my questions about the inmates of the little house on the hill. He remembered Betty Lamitz's sudden appearance there twenty years ago very well. Her own home was in a neighboring place, where, her mother having died without leaving any property, the parish refused to receive her. She was a servant in an aristocratic house in Prague, and behaved properly enough until one of the sons of the house, an officer home on a furlough, noticed her. She had been a fine-looking person even at thirty, in spite of her flat nose and broad cheeks, a maid with unusual eyes, and when she laughed--which to be sure she seldom did--she could cut out many younger women even then. But things simply went the usual way, in spite of her cleverness, and although she had always said she would never do as her own mother had done. Of course her master did not keep her in the house. He gave her a suitable sum of money, with which she bought the forsaken hill-house and the bit of garden plot, and since then, as she would not go into service again, perhaps could not, she had lived there and brought Hannah up, in perfect retirement. For the first few years the young count remembered her, and sent her something. After awhile he failed to do this, and she

was obliged to struggle along by herself. She had done so; and certainly no one could accuse her of grief at her child's lack of reason.

"Then my driver spoke of the sad affair with the judge's son, against whom he expressed himself in very strong terms. Every one knew about it. But he was the only son of a most respectable family, and no one could expect him to make amends for the foolish mis-step by an honest marriage. A wild, insane thing! Why didn't the old woman watch her better? If he did a little something for the child, no one would blame him much for this youthful sin.

"I listened without entering into any discussion of the moral aspect of the case. In my heart--I know not why--I felt such intense sympathy for the poor creature, that if her betrayer had come in my way, I would have thrashed him with much pleasure.

"My first action, when I saw my people again, was to tell them of my experience, and induce my good sister to take some interest in the neglected young woman. She was true to her sympathetic nature. The next day she sent her 'Mamselle,' an experienced, elderly person, in a carriage to Mother Lamitz's hut, with a basket containing all sorts of good things--provisions for several weeks, baby-clothes, and several uncut dress pieces to provide for the winter. To this I added a trifle in cash, fully intending to go in person very soon, and see if this feeble attempt to make up the deficiencies of the world-system had been at all effectual.

"But I did not go. Our physician ordered me to take sea-baths earlier than I expected. I merely heard that our gifts were received by the old woman with but moderate thanks, and by the young mother with child-like exultation. Then I departed, remaining away the entire summer, and the inmates of that forest hut soon became of as little moment to me as any beggar into whose hat one tosses a groschen.

"Even when, after having washed away in the sea my invalidism and its accompanying world-sickness, I returned to the estate in the autumn for hunting, it did not occur to me for several weeks to inquire about the 'four females.' My sister and her husband had themselves been away, and been occupied with entirely different things. On a lonely tramp which I undertook one cold, cloudy, disagreeable day in the middle of October, I suddenly recollected that I had wandered over the same forest-path five months before, and that it had finally led me to the donkey with the 'immortal soul.' What might have happened to Minka in the meantime?

"I stepped along more briskly, for evening was already coming on. It was dark and comfortless in the forest; the moisture dripped heavily from the pines; the little clearings, with their bushes and birches,

were not so cheerful, in spite of the red berries hanging plentifully on their faded branches, as on that day in May, when I alone wore a troubled face. When I finally emerged from the pines at the edge of the height, the land below me and the purplish peaks on the horizon looked as strange as if a terrible storm were impending. The air was perfectly still; one heard each drop falling on the dry leaves, and, from time to time, the crows, very numerous in that locality, cawing in the treetops. The noise was so hateful to me that, in a sort of sudden fury, I snatched my gun from my shoulder, and fired into the unsuspecting flock. A single bird fell fluttering and quivering at my feet. I felt ashamed of this childish outburst and hurried towards the hut, which, standing in its old place, and in the same condition, looked extremely desolate in the murky evening mist.

"The enclosed space had beautified itself with half a dozen tall sunflowers and with several rows of pumpkin-vines growing over the rubbish-heap; but the black hen had evidently failed to outlive the summer. On the side of the house where the brook flowed, and where Minka had lain, there was no longer any trace of her. Possibly it was now too cold on this damp couch for the poor, wounded beast. But where had she gone? I laughed to myself as I realized that the fate of the brute creature was more interesting to me than that of the hut's human inmates. Of them nothing was to be seen or heard.

"In the room where the loom stood, excepting that the straw-bed was empty, everything appeared as at my first visit. But the oven was cold and all the windows were open. I pressed the door-latch of the single, mean chamber on the right of the narrow hall. Here I was amazed to find one at least of the 'four females,' the good Minka herself. She lay on a litter of yellow leaves, moss, and pine-needles, close to a low hearth, whereon coals were still glowing; and as she saw me enter, she lifted her head wearily.

"The old woman must have housed here, since, besides cooking utensils, all sorts of woman's trumpery was lying about, while on the other side of the hearth stood an ancient, grandfather's chair, with torn cushions, plainly Mother Lamitz's bedstead. She had evidently brought her sick darling into her immediate vicinity.

"I approached the poor creature and stroked her coat, for which attention her ears wagged a doleful gratitude. The wound had grown worse; indeed, her whole condition was serious, and for the first time I saw on an animal something like the hippocratic face. Seeing that I was friendly, she made a painful effort to unburden her distressed heart; but no longer able to express herself satisfactorily, she soon became silent again, and with an indescribably piteous look let her tongue loll from her mouth, thus taking away her last trace of beauty in my eyes. As I could not help her, I went out in a few moments,

leaving the door open; for the close air, which I could scarcely breathe, must have been equally unbearable for a sick donkey.

"Outside I looked about in all directions. Of grandmother, mother, or child--not a trace. In the forest--but what could they be seeking there so late, and in such horrible weather? They have gone down to the town, thought I, to make some purchases. But nobody knows when they will return.

"To await them in the damp hut was out of the question. I thought that perhaps I might meet them on the way down, as I intended to descend and return by the highroad, instead of the dark, slippery forest path. So once again I took the little path between the meadows, and heard then, for the first time, a muffled sound of musical instruments, principally clarionets and contrabasses, evidently coming from the inn in the town below. Although dance music, it was far from merry; indeed, it seemed but a proper accompaniment to the melancholy song heaven and earth were singing together; as if cloud spirits were playing a waltz to which they might whirl madly over the cold mountain-tops.

"The neighborhood is not musical. Only occasionally, when a band of wandering Bohemians strays into this corner of the hills, does one hear merry tunes in lively time; but even a Bohemian band can seldom set in motion the clumsy feet of the men and maids.

"However, that scarcely belongs to my subject. I will be brief. I had not taken twenty steps when I saw, down by the fishpond, sitting on a mossy stone, a woman's motionless figure, with the back turned toward me. She seemed to be staring into the black water. I could scarcely see the outline, yet I recognized her at once.

"'Mother Lamitz!' I cried, 'Mother Lamitz!'

"At the third call, and when I was very close to her, she slowly turned her head, but I could not see her eyes.

"'Why do you sit here on a wet stone, Mother Lamitz?' I asked. 'Have you thrown a net and do you wish to haul your catch? Or for whom are you waiting in this unhealthy fog?'

"She looked straight into my face, evidently trying to remember the person to whom these features and this voice belonged. But it dawned on her very slowly.

"I helped somewhat by recalling to her mind my spring visit, and telling her that since then I had often considered whether or no donkeys would go to heaven, and had never arrived at any conclusion. She listened silently, but I was not certain that she rightly

understood my meaning, for she nodded continually, even when I asked a question demanding a negative answer.

"But when I mentioned her daughter's name, she became suddenly alert, looking suspiciously at me from under her thick brows.

"'What do you want with Hannah?' she said. 'She is not at home. But she is very well, she and her brat. Did I tell you she was a trifle weak in the head? In that I lied. She had more sense than most of the foolish geese. Oh, I wish that I might have gone away so, but there are different gifts, and how does the Testament say? Those who are poor in spirit--yes, yes. O thou merciful One!'

"Stopping suddenly, she spread her hands on her knees and let her head fall upon her breast.

"She seemed more and more uncanny to me. It was ghastly there by the bank; the bats were beginning to flit among the low bushes, and the rising wind brought a musty swamp odor. From below came the unceasing music of the clarionets and basses.

"Merely to break the silence, I said, 'There seems to be high festival in the inn down yonder. Is it a feast?'

"She sprang to her feet, again looking distrustfully at me. 'Have you only just heard it? They have piped and fiddled so since noonday, and will go on till midnight. I have stopped my ears, but it is useless. Weddings are not funerals--one knows that very well--but if they knew, if they knew! To be sure they would not have one waltz the less. O thou merciful One!'

"'Whose wedding is it?'

"Spitting violently, she cast a furious look across the pond towards the house from which the sounds arose.

"'Go down there and look at the pair for yourself,' she snarled; 'they suit each other well. He is bad and handsome, and she is stupid and rich. A brewer's daughter, she measures her money by the bushel. But she has reason enough to answer a question correctly, and she did not say no when the parson asked her if she wished the judge's son for a husband.'

"'The judge's son! He?' Now, indeed, I knew the cause of the old woman's fury.

"'Poor Hannah! And does she know what is going on down there?'

"'How could she help knowing, sir? Do you think there are not sympathetic souls enough to carry such news wherever they are likely to earn God's blessing for it? She sat just before the door with her baby on her lap; she was decked out in her best clothes, that blue dress, you know, which the lady baroness sent her; and her baby was dancing to the music. Then the druggist's maid came down, pretending that she passed by accident, but it was the wickedest curiosity, dear sir, to see how the poor fool would act when she heard that her lover was holding his wedding feast down there. She did not tell it to Hannah. "Mother Betsey!" she screamed in to me, "the judge's son! What do you say to that?" and then she abused the badness of the world. I merely blinked at her, for I thought I should sink into the earth. I never believed he would marry Hannah, but she waited for him every evening, and was so happy doing so, that she might have expected him for all eternity, and sung her cradle-songs contentedly. And now the whole baseness of it, and the news of the marriage with the brewer's daughter, to come on her so suddenly--as if a trusted friend had thrust a knife in her breast. The words stuck in the spiteful tell-tale's throat as she saw what she had done. She said she must hurry; her mistress expected her, and she ran off. I went out and saw the poor thing sitting on the bank, with her head leaning back on the wall as if too heavy for her, and her eyes and mouth wide open.

"'"Hannah!" I coaxed, "do not believe it--she lied," and as much more as I could bear to say. She did not speak, but all at once laughed aloud, and stood up, holding her child fast in her arms.

"'"Where are you going?" I said. "Come into the house. I will brew you some elder tea." But it was as if she did not hear me. She went slowly away from the house, down the path. I followed, trying to hold her back by her clothing, but there was something superhuman in her; her face was rigid and deathly pale. "Hannah," said I, "you are not going to him? Think what they would say if you went to the wedding. They would say you were out of your wits, and by and by the law would come and take away the child, because they dare not leave it with an idiot."

"'That brought her to her senses for a moment. She stood still, clasping the child silently, and sighing as if her soul would leave her body. I thought I had won, and that she would turn back with me and gradually give in. If she could have cried it would have been her salvation, but her eyes were perfectly dry, and I saw her stare continually at the house down there, as if she would pierce the walls and destroy that bad man and his bridge with the wreath and veil. I begged her to come into the house. I realized then that I had nothing in the world but her, and I told her so, asking her to forgive me for all my roughness and unkindness to her. Dear God, when one is so miserable, and another hungry mouth comes into the house! But she heard nothing. The music seemed to bewitch her; she began to rock the child

back and forth; then of a sudden she gave a loud cry, as if her heart had broken, and before I knew what she meant to do, she was rushing down to the pond. Her loose hair streamed after her, the blue clothes fluttered, she ran so fast, and--O thou merciful One!--with my own eyes I saw it--child and grandchild! I tried to scream, I was choking; I ran like a madman; as I came down, I saw only the black water, bubbling like a kettle at the place where--'

"She sprang up, and stood half bowed among the damp marsh grasses like a picture of despair, both arms outstretched toward the now motionless water.

"I could not speak a word. Every instant I thought she would throw herself in after them. The spot where we were standing seemed peculiarly suitable for a suicide. The bank shelved perpendicularly into the depths; no rushes grew out of the water; the alder bushes, retreating, left a gap several feet in width; and even close to shore the water was as dark as if the depths were bottomless.

"But the old woman seemed to intend nothing violent. Her body relaxed again and her arms fell loosely on her hips.

"'Do you see anything there?' she asked suddenly, in an undertone.

"'Where?'

"'Down there by the willow? No; it is nothing. I thought her hair came to the surface. But she is lying at the bottom. At first something yellow floated out on the water--I would swear it was her hair--and the long rake there, left since haying-time--if I had taken it, and fished for the hair with it, and twisted it fast around the prongs, I believe I could have pulled her to land even then. But say for yourself, sir, what would it have mattered? She would have jumped in again. And wouldn't it have been wicked to rob her of the rest she has found down there? Who knows that I should have drawn out the poor brat with her! And without her only plaything, what could she do in the world?'

"She stopped again, rubbing her lean shoulders with her crossed arms as if she felt a fever-chill. The music paused in the inn below; I heard the old woman's quick, gasping breaths, and now and then a disconnected word as if of prayer. This sad stillness was suddenly interrupted by a hoarse bray from the woods above. We both looked around.

"Lame Minka stood before the hut's door, giving her most doleful signal of distress. Against the dark background the outline of the beast's gray form was plainly visible; we could even see her shake her drooping ears. She must have noticed us, for though we did not call her, she started down the rough and tiresome road to her old nurse.

"'Are you coming, too?' said the old woman. 'Are you thirsty, because I forgot to fill your pail? Do you see, sir, that I am right? Minka has human reason. She too would make an end of her trouble and misery. And it is better so; it will take her at once from her suffering, and I--do you know, that I believe even yet that donkeys go to heaven? If not, why have they human reason? Who knows, when he fears to die, that it is really the end? And now look at Minka, how steadily she trots toward the black water. Come, Minka, come, poor fool! We will help you down.'

"The brute came to the stone where the old woman was crouching. It thrust its large head in her lap, and fell on its knees. The old woman helped it up again.

"'Come, Minka,' she repeated, 'it will do no harm, and perhaps may help you to eternal happiness. Hannah has gone before, with little Mary. Mother Betsey will soon follow.'

"She drew the reluctant animal to the edge of the pond and tried to force it in. But entreaties and caresses were as vain as the pushes and blows to which she finally resorted. The poor victim, its whole body trembling, braced all four feet against the bank and gave a piteous cry. The old woman cast an imploring glance at me.

"'You have a gun at your back, sir. Will you not do my Minka this last kindness, and help her to her salvation? The Lord God will repay you the little powder and lead which you spend on a tortured creature; and if there is justice, and we meet again up yonder, Minka, too, will not be wanting, and then you shall see that, after the ass that bore our Lord into Jerusalem, there will be none more beautiful than Minka in all Paradise.'

"How could I withstand such a touching request? I cocked my gun, came close to the good creature, and shot a bullet through its head. It fell headlong into the water; the gray head appeared for an instant, then sank and left no trace.

"The old woman fell upon her knees; I saw her fold her withered hands and move her lips silently. Undoubtedly, she breathed a prayer for Minka's departed soul.

"Then she arose wearily. 'I thank you, sir,' she said. 'You have just done me a greater kindness than when you sent me the money. When you go home give my respects to the lady baroness. Tell her I need nothing more. Three are already at rest, and the fourth will not delay long. And so may God preserve you. I am freezing. I shall go back to the house and warm myself a little. The night will be cold and the house is empty. May God reward you a thousandfold, sir! No; you shall not go

with me! I have no one, and the cursed music will let me sleep very well if I stop my ears tightly enough. Good-night, sir! Rest well. And the Lord God above will understand and deal kindly with us. Amen!'

"She crossed herself and bowed quietly. Then she climbed the slope across the meadow, and I watched her until she reached her hut above and closed the door behind her.

"I myself returned to the path in a state of mind that baffles description. The universal misery of mankind was about the drift of it. But other elements mingling with it gave the peculiar experience something at once grotesque and awful. A professional psychologist would have had difficulty in understanding it.

"Fortunately the weather took care that I did not lose myself in this bottomless pit of fruitless speculation. Just as I reached the first houses, the rain began to fall in such torrents that I was obliged to seek shelter and wait until the storm should abate before attempting to return to the estate. Naturally, I hastened to the inn. I had a certain curiosity to see the famous judge's son on this day, when his old sweetheart had quietly taken herself out of the world to make room for his new one.

"It was a middle-class wedding of the usual sort. I looked through the open door into the hall, where the table had been removed to make room for the dancers. The wedding pair immediately struck my eyes, not unfavorably either; he was precisely such a man as I imagined, curly-headed, therefore popular among women, and with a frivolous, insolent face; on the whole, a good-looking rascal of the most common type. The young wife in her myrtle wreath, a provincial beauty, appeared much in love with her husband, but, from continual dancing with him, was too red and overheated to be lovely. Since she was rich, the husband had in fact obtained a better lot than his villainous deed warranted, and it was hardly to be expected that compensating justice would make him do penance for his sins through this marriage. He did not seem to be a man who would endure such penance calmly, much less pass even one sleepless night in useless thoughts upon the moral system of the world.

"The wretch disgusted me. Joining the peasants in the bar-room below, I drank my glass of beer in a very bitter mood, while the floor above creaked and trembled under the stamping and springing of the dancers, and the rain beat against the windows. This continued for more than an hour; then the rain ceased, the clouds moved towards the mountains, and the moon appeared. I decided to look about for a team, since the roads were now unfit for walking, and the wedding uproar made the prospect of a night here intolerable.

"Fortunately, just as I was going out to inquire for a teamster, I found my brother-in-law's coachman before the door with the hunting-wagon, my sister having sent him to bring me home. Both he and his horses needed a rest and a thorough drying. The homeward journey was so slow that I found everyone at the house asleep, and could not tell my horrible experience of the previous day till the following morning as we three sat at breakfast.

"We were still under the influence of the strange tragedy--my sister, who had visited the 'four females' once during the summer, being affected even to tears--when the door opened, and my brother-in-law's steward entered. 'I merely wish to announce, Herr Baron,' he said, 'that there has been a fire during the night. God be thanked, it has not spread, and was not on our estate. But Mother Betsey's house is burned.'

"We looked at one another confounded.

"'How did the fire start, and was any one injured?' asked my brother-in-law.

"The man shook his head.

"'They know nothing positively, Herr Baron,' he said. 'At midnight, as the last dance was being played down in the inn--the judge's son was holding his wedding feast--they suddenly heard the fire-bells ring from the towers, and, rushing out, they saw Mother Lamitz's old hut up on the forest edge in bright flames. The fire streamed as quietly into the sky as if from a wood-pile, and although half the village was on foot, and the fire engine was dragged up the mountain, they could do nothing whatever, the flames having already devoured the last corner of the old rookery. It was only when there was nothing left to save that they mastered the fire; the ground walls, about a man's height, alone remain standing, if they too have not fallen by this time. At first there seemed to be nothing left of the women and the child. At length some one discovered in the corner where the loom had stood a ghastly heap of ashes and blackened bones, undoubtedly the remains of old Betsey, who, as old women can never be warm enough, probably heated the oven so hot that the rotten thing burst and the flames reached the rafters of the loom. She must have been quickly suffocated by the smoke and have died without further pain. But what became of her daughter and the little one nobody knows, and as for the donkey, which she esteemed so highly, not the smallest piece of its hide or bones can be discovered!'"

Le Pochard
from *Zut and Other Parisians*, by Guy Wetmore Carryl
EBook #43216

HIS applicability was evident to the mind of Jean Fraissigne from the moment when the camelot placed Le Pochard on a table in front of the Taverne, and he proceeded to go through his ridiculous pretense of drinking from the cup in his left hand which he filled from the bottle in his right. Jean, who was dawdling over a demi, and watching the familiar ebb and flow of life on the Boul' Miche', was at first passively pleased at the distraction provided by the appearance of the toy, and then, of a sudden, consumedly absorbed in the progress of his operations. For what was plain to any but a blind man was the fact that Le Pochard was the precise counterfeit of Jean's friend and comrade, GrØgoire--GrØgoire, with his flat-brimmed hat, and his loose working blouse, and his loud checked trousers--GrØgoire, hØlas! with his flushed face, and his tremulous hands, and his unsteady walk, as Jean had seen him a hundred times!

Le Pochard staggered to and fro upon the marble-topped table, nodding maudlinly, and alternately filling his cup and raising it uncertainly to his expressionless face. At last, weakened by his exertions, he passed one arm through the handle of Jean's demi, hesitated, and then leaned heavily against the glass and stood motionless, with his topheavy head bent forward, and his eyes fixed on the price-mark upon the saucer below. This eloquent manoeuvre, so unspeakably appealing, determined the future ownership of Le Pochard. Jean purchased him upon the spot, and bore him off in triumph to the rue de Seine, as an object lesson for GrØgoire Caubert.

The two students shared a little sous-toit within a stone's throw of the Beaux-Arts, neither luxuriously nor yet insufficiently furnished. It was Jean's good fortune to have a father who believed in him--not a usual condition of mind in a provincial merchant whose son displays an unaccountable partiality for architecture--and, what was more to the point, who could afford to demonstrate his confidence by remittances, which were inspiring, if not on the score of magnitude, at least on that of regularity. And, since freedom from pecuniary solicitude is the surest guarantee of a cheerful spirit, there was no more diligent pupil at the Bo te, no blither comrade in idle hours,--above all, no more loyal friend, in sun or shadow, throughout the length and breadth of the Quartier, than little Jean le Gai, as he was called by those who loved him, and whom he loved.

That was why the comrades were at a loss to understand his friendship for GrØgoire Caubert. Had the latter been one of themselves, a type of

the schools, in that fact alone, whatever his peculiarities, would have lain a reason for the association. But, to all intents and purposes, he was of another world. His similarity to Jean and to themselves began and ended with his costume. For the rest he was silent and reserved, courting no confidence and giving none, unknowing and unknown to the haunts they frequented,--the Deux Magots, the Escholiers, the Taverne, the Bullier, and Madame Roupiquet's in the rue de Beaune, and the Rouge on Thursday nights. Jean le Gai, when questioned as to the doings of GrØgoire, seemed to reflect something of his friend's reserve. He admitted that the other wrote: he even went so far as to prophesy that some day GrØgoire would be famous. Further, he made no admissions.

"Diable!" he said. "What does it matter? He goes his way--I go mine. And if we choose to live together, whose concern is it then, I ask you? Fichez-moi la paix, vous autres!"

So popular curiosity went unsatisfied, so far as GrØgoire was concerned, and the apparently uncongenial mØnage came, in time, to be looked upon as one of the unexplained mysteries of the Quartier,--one, for the rest, which made no particular difference to any one save the two immediately concerned.

But if Jean made no admissions as to GrØgoire, it was not for lack of sufficient knowledge. They had met, as men meet in the Quartier,--as bubbles meet in a stream, and, for reasons not apparent, are drawn together by an irresistible attraction, and fuse into one larger, brighter bubble than either has been before. For little Jean Fraissigne, whose exquisses were the wonder of the School, and whose projets had already come to be photographed and sold in the shops of the rue Bonaparte and the quai Conti, believed in his heart that architecture was as nothing compared to literature, and GrØgoire, whose long, uphill struggle had been unaccompanied by comradely admiration or even encouragement, found indescribable comfort, in the hour of his success, in the faith and approbation of the friend who alone, of all men, knew his secret,--knew that the RØnØde Lys of the "Chansons de DanaØ" and the "Voyage de Tristan" of which all Paris was talking, was none other than himself--GrØgoire Caubert, on whose wrist the siren of absinthe had laid a hand that was not to be shaken off, and whom she was leading, if by the paths of subtlest fancy and almost miraculous creative faculty, yet toward an end inevitable on which he did not dare to dwell.

To Jean, healthy, rational, and cheerful as a young terrier, much that GrØgoire said and did was totally incomprehensible, but what he did not understand he set down, with conviction, to the eccentricity of genius. The long nights which he spent alone, sleeping sanely in their bedroom in the rue de Seine, while GrØgoire's cot stood empty beside him, and GrØgoire himself was tramping the streets of Paris; the return of his friend in the first faint light of dawn, pale-faced and swaying; the

succeeding hours which, despite his exhaustion, he spent at his desk, feverishly writing, and tossing the pages from him, one by one, until the floor was strewn with them on all sides; finally, his heavy slumber far into the afternoon,--all this, to Jean, was but part and parcel of that marvelous thing called literature. He returned at seven to find that GrØgoire had prepared a wonderful little meal, and was walking up and down the floor, unevenly, absinthe in hand, awaiting his arrival.

In the two hours which followed lay the keynote of their sympathy. It was then that GrØgoire would read his work of the early morning hour, to Jean, curled up on the divan, with his hands clasped behind his head and his eyes round and wide with delight and admiration. What things they were, those fancies that GrØgoire had pursued and caught, like night-moths, in the streets of Paris, while stupid folk were sleeping! And how he read them, GrØgoire, with his flushed face lit with inspiration, and his eyes flaming with enthusiasm! If only he would not drink absinthe, thought little Jean, and said so, timidly at first, and then more earnestly, as, little by little, the marks of excess grew more plain in his friend. But GrØgoire made a joke of this--he who always joked--and in time, Jean came to acquiesce. For he never wholly understood--until afterwards.

So, when nine struck, it was understood that they parted company till the following evening. Jean brought out his drawing board, his T square, and all their attendant paraphernalia, and toiled at his calques with infinite patience and unerring accuracy, until midnight; and GrØgoire, having corrected his manuscript here and there, gnawing savagely at his pencil the while, inclosed it in one of his long envelopes, scrawled "RØdaction du Journal" upon it, stamped it, and went out into the night to mail the old, and seek new moths. And this was all there was to the comradeship which mystified the Quartier, save that the love of Jean for GrØgoire and of GrØgoire for Jean was as deep and unfaltering as the current of the eternal Seine--and, if anything, more silent!

Jean wound up Le Pochard stealthily, on the landing outside the apartment door, and, entering, placed it suddenly upon the table under the very nose of GrØgoire, who stood, sipping his absinthe, in the centre of the room. Le Pochard rocked and swayed, ticking like a little clock, and drinking cup after cup of his imaginary beverage, as if his life depended upon the quantity consumed. Convulsed with merriment at the performance of the preposterous creature, Jean le Gai lay prone upon the divan, kneading the cushions with his fists and kicking his heels against the floor, and GrØgoire, a slow smile curling his thin, sensitive lips, seemed to forget even his absinthe until the toy's energy slackened and he paused, with the bottle shaking in his hand, and his eyes, as usual, bent upon the ground. Then--"Eh b'en--quoi?" said GrØgoire, looking up at his friend.

"Mais c'est toi!" burst out the little architect in an ecstasy. "It is thou to the life, my GrØgoire! Remark the blouse--what?--and the hat, sale pompier!--and the checked grimpant, name of a pipe! But it is thy brother, Le Pochard!--thy twin--thou, thyself!"

And seizing the glass from GrØgoire's hand, he carefully filled Le Pochard's cup with absinthe, and set him reeling and swaggering again, so that the immoral little animal spilled the liquid on his blouse, and presently fell headlong, totally overcome, with his nose pressed flat against the table.

Thereafter, it was a comradeship of three instead of two. It was quite in accord with the whimsically fanciful nature of GrØgoire that he should take Le Pochard into his affections, and even call him "brother" and "cher confrŁre." He treated him, did GrØgoire, with marked deference and studied non-observance of his besetting weakness, and he expected and received from Le Pochard a like respect and indulgence in return. That, at least, was how he described their relations to Jean, and Jean, curled up upon the divan, was never tired of the droll pretense, but would laugh night after night till the tears came, at the common tact and the mutual courtesy of GrØgoire and Le Pochard.

Linked by this new, if unstable, bond of sympathy, neither of the friends understood, during the months that followed, that their paths, which had so long lain parallel, were gradually but inevitably diverging. Jean was now wrapped heart and soul in the competition for the Prix de Rome, and, as he said himself, en charrette eternally. Even the work of his comrade, which formerly had held him spell-bound, lost for him, little by little, much of its compellant charm. His nimble mind, busy with the stern, symmetrical lines of columns and the intricate proportioning of capitals, drifted imperceptibly away from its one-time appreciation of pure imagery. He returned later at night from the atelier, consumed the meal they ate in common with growing impatience, and was busy with his calques again before GrØgoire had fairly finished his coffee. The evening readings, grown shorter and shorter, were finally abandoned altogether, and, oftener than not, Jean was totally oblivious to the presence of GrØgoire, correcting his manuscript at the little desk, or his noiseless departure with the stamped envelope under his arm. Had he been told, he would have denied his defection with the scorn bred by conviction. It was not that he loved his comrade less, but only that the growing promise of the Prix de Rome lay, like the marvel of dawn, on the horizon of the immediate future, blinding his eyes to all beside. For Jean le Gai was finding himself, and in the crescent light of that new and wonderful discovery whatever had been bright before grew tawdry.

Only one evidence remained of what had been. Le Pochard, with his absurd inanity, was yet a feature of every dinner in the rue de Seine, and

because GrØgoire invented daily some new drollery in connection with their senseless toy, Jean was unaware that things were no longer the same,--that his friend was thinner and more nervous, that the circles had deepened under his eyes, that he said no word of his work. They laughed together at Le Pochard, and laughed again at their own amusement. So the days went by and still their paths diverged,--Jean's toward the sungilt hills of promise and prosperity, GrØgoire's toward the valley of shadow that a man must tread alone.

Despite his proclivities, neither foresaw the end of Le Pochard. So gradual was his decline toward utter degradation that the varnish was gone from his narrow boots and his round, weak face, and his simple attire was frayed and worn, before they had remarked the change. Then, one night, as GrØgoire wound him, the key turned futilely in the spring. Placed in his accustomed position on the table, Le Pochard made one feeble gesture of surrender with his bottle, one unavailing effort to raise his absinthe to his lips, and, reeling dizzily, crashed down upon the floor, his debauches done with forever.

It was a curious thing that, in the face of this absurdity, neither of the comrades smiled. In some unaccountable fashion Le Pochard had come to be so much a part of their association that in his passing there was less of farce than tragedy. And Jean, looking across at GrØgoire, saw for the first time the pitiful change that had crept into the face of his friend, the utter weariness where restless energy had been, the dullness of the eyes wherein had played imagination, like a will-o'-the-wisp above the slough of destiny. And GrØgoire, looking across at Jean, knew that the moment had come, and dropped his glance, ashamed, fingering the tattered clothes of Le Pochard.

"One might have expected it," said Jean, with a smile that was not a smile. "I suppose we must forgive him his faults, now that he is gone. _De mortuis nil nisi bonum!_"

Then, as GrØgoire made no reply, he added,

"I shall not work to-night. I am tired. Que veux-tu? I have been doing too much. So we will sit by the fire, n'est ce pas, vieux? And thou shalt read to me as before. Dieu! It is a long time since the moths have shown their wings!"

In the tiny grate the cannel coal snapped and spat fretfully, and Jean, buried in the largest chair, winked at the sparks, and, furtively, from the corners of his brown eyes, watched GrØgoire reading, half-heartedly, with the lamp-light cutting sharply across his thin cheek and his temples, on which the veins stood singularly out.

He was no critic, little Jean le Gai, yet even he knew that something

had touched and bruised the wings of this latest moth that GrØgoire had pursued and caught while stupid folk were sleeping, so that it was not, as had been the others, downed with the shifting brilliance of many unimagined hues, but dull and sombre, like the look he had surprised in the face of his friend. And so subtly keyed were the strings of their unspoken sympathy that night, that a sense of the other's feeling stole in upon GrØgoire long before the manuscript was finished, and suddenly he cast it from him into the grate, where the little flames caught at it, and wrapped it round, and sucked out its life, exulting, until it lay blackened and dying, writhing on the coals.

"Why?" said Jean. But he knew.

"Because," answered GrØgoire slowly, with his eyes upon the shrunken, faintly whispering ashes of his pages, whereat the sparks gnawed with insatiable greed, "because, my little one, it is finished. What I have done I shall never do again. Never didst thou wholly understand--least of all in these last days when thy work absorbed thee. If one is to catch night-moths with such a tender touch, and preserve them for other men to see so carefully, that no one little glint of radiance may be missing from their wings, one has need of a clear eye and of a steady hand. Neither is mine. My father, of whom I have never spoken to thee,--my father, who left me this gift of trapping the thoughts that others see not as they fly, yet love and prize when they are caught and pinned upon the page, yet left me a companion curse,--the curse of absinthe, little Jean, that is not to be gainsaid. For as the gift was beautiful, so was it also frail, and as the curse was subtle, so was it also strong. I have seen the end--long, long. Now it is here. My work is finished. The curse has knocked at the door of my body, and, at the signal, the gift has flown forth from the window of my soul."

He paused, and pausing, smiled.

"Thou didst most nearly understand me, Jean," he continued, "in buying Le Pochard. For in truth, he was my brother--my twin--my soul, in the semblance of a toy! How we have laughed at him! Yet all along I have seen myself in that senseless little man of tin. Is it fanciful? Peut-Œtre bien! But, now that he is gone, I see that I must go, too,--and in the same way, my Jean, in the same way,--with my absinthe in my hand and the key of inspiration turning uselessly in the broken spring of my heart!"

He rose suddenly, with a shiver, and looked down at Jean le Gai. For an instant he touched him on the hair, and then he was gone into the night, leaving the little architect gazing, wide-eyed and mute, at the crinkling ashes of the last, unworthiest moth of all.

During the days that followed, Le Pochard stood upon the mantel-corner.

They no longer touched him, but left him, as it were, a monument to his own folly.

There was no further trace in GrØgoire's manner of the mood which had loosed his tongue on the night of his last reading. To Jean, who, in his simplicity stood ready with comfort and encouragement, he seemed to be in need of neither. Plainly, what he had said was but a phase of that strange imagination which had dictated the exquisite pathos of his "DanaØ" and his "Tristan;" and this one thing little Jean had learned,--that his friend lived the moods he wrote, and that oftentimes, when what he said was seemingly most personal, he was posing for his own pen--a painter in speech, drawing from his reflection in a mirror opposite. So the vague alarm aroused by GrØgoire's words died down, and Jean plunged once more into his work.

In those last days of the competition his projet, laboriously builded, detail by detail, leaped into completion with a suddenness startling even to himself. He knew that it was good,--knew so without the surprising enthusiasm of his comrades at the atelier, and the still more surprising commendation of his patron, the great Laloux himself, whose policy was _nil admirari_, whose frown a habit, and whose "Bon!" a miracle. But even Jean le Gai, with all his buoyant optimism, was unprepared in conviction for those words which reverberated, to his ears like thunder, beneath the dome of the Institut.

"Prix de Rome--Jean Fraissigne--Atelier Laloux!"

Would GrØgoire _never_ come? He asked himself the question a hundred times as he paced the floor of their living-room an hour before dinner, exulting in the cold roast chicken and the champagne, and the huge MarØchale Niel rose which he had purchased for the occasion. For he was determined, was Jean le Gai, that GrØgoire should be the first to know. Was it not GrØgoire who had encouraged him all along, who had prophesied success when as yet the projet was no more than an exquisse exquisse, who had laughed down Jean's forebodings, and magnified Jean's hopes a hundred-fold? Yes, evidently GrØgoire must be the first to know, before even a bleu should be sent to Avignon to gladden the heart of Fraissigne pŁre!

But when GrØgoire came, there was no need to tell him after all. For it was the chicken that shouted Jean's news--the chicken, and the champagne, and the great yellow rose, and, most of all, the face of Jean himself. So it was that GrØgoire held out his long, thin arms, wide-spread, and that into them rushed Jean, to be hugged and patted, as he gabbled some things that there was such a thing as understanding and many more that there was not.

"Rome--Rome, think of it! And the paternel--but he will die of joy! Ah,

mon vieux,--Rome! The dreams--the hopes--all I have wished for--and now--and now--Ah, mon vieux, mon vieux!"

And so again and again, clamoring incoherently, while GrØgoire, holding him tight, could only pat and pat, and say, over and over,--

"It is well, my little brother! My little brother, it is very, very well!"

They dined like princes, these two, pledging each other, laughing, singing, shouting. Never had Jean le Gai so well deserved his name, never had GrØgoire been so whimsically droll. Even Le Pochard was restored to his old position and coaxed to repeat his former antics. But it was all in vain. The key refused to catch the spring, and, replaced upon the table, Le Pochard only nodded once or twice with profound melancholy, and stared at little Jean out of his round eyes. Once, Jean thought he caught in the face of his friend a hint of the sadness of that other night, but when he looked again the sadness, if sadness it were, was gone. GrØgoire filled his glass, and pledged him anew with a laugh.

"Rome, mon petit frŁre--Rome!"

At nine, they went out together, Jean to dispatch his bleu and join the comrades at the Taverne--for this was a night to be celebrated with songs and many drained demis--and GrØgoire, who knew where?

Who knew where? Only the Seine, perhaps, sulking past the rampart on which he leaned, thinking, thinking, until the gaunt dawn crept up, like a sick man from his bed, behind the towers of Notre Dame; and the shutters of the shops on the quai Conti came rattling down, and the street cries went shrilly through the thin morning air: "Rac'modeur d'fa ence et d'por-or-celaine!" or "'Archand de r binets! Tureetutu, tureetutututututu!" Then GrØgoire went slowly back to the rue de Seine.

Jean spent the succeeding days in a whirl of excitement. There were calls to be made, farewell suppers to be eaten, and all the preparation for departure to be superintended. Fraissigne pŁre sent a joyful letter, and in the letter a substantial draft, so that Jean had two new complets, and shirts, and socks, and shoes, and a brilliantly varnished trunk with his name and address painted in black letters on the end,--"J. Fraissigne, Villa Medici, Rome." It was magnificent! In this and a packing case he stowed his clothes and his household gods, though when the latter had been collected, the little apartment in the rue de Seine looked pitifully bare. There were dark squares on the faded red wall-paper, and clean circles in the dust of the shelves, where his pictures and casts and little ornaments had been, but GrØgoire only laughed and said that the place had been too crowded before, and that

the long-needed house-cleaning was no longer an impossibility.

So, before they realized the fact, the moment of parting was upon them, and the sapin, with Jean's luggage on top, stood waiting at the door. The concierge, wiping her hands upon her blue-checked apron, came out to bid her favorite lodger good-by. A little throng of curious idlers paused on the narrow sidewalk, gaping at the new trunk with the glaring lettering. The cocher was already untying the nose-bag in which his lean brown horse had been nuzzling for fifteen minutes. And, on the curb, arm linked in arm, the two comrades stood watching him, with no courage to meet each other's eyes. For each had a thousand things to say and never a word in which to say so much as one.

At the end, as their hands met, it was only a commonplace that came to Jean's tongue.

"Thou wilt write me, vieux? And in four years--ce qui va vite, du reste!--we shall be together once more!"

In four years--in four years--in four years! The words beat dully at GrØgoire's temples, as he watched the cab swing round the corner of the Institut toward the quai Malaquais, with Jean's handkerchief fluttering at the window of the portiŁre. Four years--four years--four years! How easy it was to say for one who did not know that the end had come,--that the moths of fancy that fly by night must be caught by others now, that the siren of absinthe was standing ready to claim her own!

GrØgoire mounted the stairs slowly, unlocked the door, and stepped into the familiar room, dim now in the last faint light of day. His absinthe stood upon the table, and he took it up, and paused, looking about him. Presently he went forward to the mantel, and, laying one hand upon it, bent forward, peering at a little photograph of Jean which leaned against the mirror. The woodwork jarred under his touch, and Le Pochard in his corner stirred, ticked feebly, and strove to raise his cup to his lips. Wheeling at the sound, GrØgoire met the eyes of the dissipated little toy for a full minute, motionless and silent. Then with a sob, he hurled his glass into the grate, where it was shivered into a hundred fragments, and flung himself on his knees by the divan, with his face buried in his hands.

"Mon frŁrot!" he murmured, "my little brother--help me--help me to be strong."

On the mantle, Le Pochard bent his head and gazed shamefacedly upon the ground.

For his reign was at an end.

The Travelling Post Office

from *An Anthology of Australian Verse*, by Various
Edited by Bertram Stevens Etext #1199

The roving breezes come and go, the reed beds sweep and sway,
The sleepy river murmurs low, and loiters on its way,
It is the land of lots o' time along the Castlereagh.

. . . . .

The old man's son had left the farm, he found it dull and slow,
He drifted to the great North-west where all the rovers go.
"He's gone so long," the old man said, "he's dropped right out of mind,
But if you'd write a line to him I'd take it very kind;
He's shearing here and fencing there, a kind of waif and stray,
He's droving now with Conroy's sheep along the Castlereagh.
The sheep are travelling for the grass, and travelling very slow;
They may be at Mundooran now, or past the Overflow,
Or tramping down the black soil flats across by Waddiwong,
But all those little country towns would send the letter wrong,
The mailman, if he's extra tired, would pass them in his sleep,
It's safest to address the note to 'Care of Conroy's sheep',
For five and twenty thousand head can scarcely go astray,
You write to 'Care of Conroy's sheep along the Castlereagh'."

. . . . .

By rock and ridge and riverside the western mail has gone,
Across the great Blue Mountain Range to take that letter on.
A moment on the topmost grade while open fire doors glare,
She pauses like a living thing to breathe the mountain air,
Then launches down the other side across the plains away
To bear that note to "Conroy's sheep along the Castlereagh".

And now by coach and mailman's bag it goes from town to town,
And Conroy's Gap and Conroy's Creek have marked it "further down".
Beneath a sky of deepest blue where never cloud abides,
A speck upon the waste of plain the lonely mailman rides.
Where fierce hot winds have set the pine and myall boughs asweep
He hails the shearers passing by for news of Conroy's sheep.
By big lagoons where wildfowl play and crested pigeons flock,
By camp fires where the drovers ride around their restless stock,
And past the teamster toiling down to fetch the wool away
My letter chases Conroy's sheep along the Castlereagh.

THE LADY OF THE PICTURE

from *Romances of Old Japan*, by Yei Theodora Ozaki
PG eBook #45933

Many years ago, long before the present prosaic era, there lived in Yedo a young man named Toshika. His family belonged to the aristocratic rank of the _hatamoto samurai_, those knights who possessed the right to march to battle directly under the Shogun's flag (_hata_), and his father was a high official in the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Toshika, whose disposition was of a dreamy and indolent nature with scholarly tastes, had no occupation. He took life easily, and when his studies were finished, he went to live at the family villa situated in the suburb of Aoyama.

Toshika was not interested in society, and except for an occasional visit to his home or to his favourite friend, he never went anywhere. Far from the world he spent his days quietly and pleasantly, reading books, tending and watering his flowers, practising the tea-ceremony, and composing poetry and playing on the flute. He was a young man of many accomplishments and studied art. He collected curios and specimens of well-known calligraphy, which all Japanese prize greatly, and he particularly delighted in pictures.

One day a certain friend whom Toshika had not seen for several months, came to call upon him. He had just returned from a visit to the seaport of Nagasaki and knowing the young man's tastes had brought with him, as a present, a Chinese drawing of a beautiful woman, which he begged Toshika to accept.

Toshika was very pleased with this acquisition to his treasures. He examined the painting carefully, and though he could find no signature of the artist, his knowledge of the subject told him that it was probably drawn by the well-known Chinese painter of the _Shin_ era.

It was the portrait of a young woman in the prime of youth, and Toshika felt intuitively that it was a real likeness. The face was one of radiant loveliness, and the longer he gazed at it, the more the charm and fascination of it grew upon him. He carried it to his own room and hung it up in the alcove. Whenever he felt lonely he retired to the solitude of his chamber, and sat for hours before the drawing, looking at it and even addressing it. As the days went by, gradually the picture seemed to glow with life and Toshika began to think of it as a person. He wondered who the original of the portrait could have been, and said that he envied the artist who had been granted the happiness

of looking upon her beauty.

Daily the figure seemed more alive and the face more exquisite, and Toshika, as he gazed in rapture upon it, longed to know its history. The haunting pathos of the expression and the speaking wistfulness of the dark soft eyes called to his heart like music and gave him no peace.

Toshika, in fact, became enamoured of the lovely image suspended in the alcove, and as the infatuation grew upon him he placed fresh flowers before it, changing them daily. At night he had his quilts[1] so arranged that the last thing he looked upon before closing his eyes in sleep was the lady of the picture.

Toshika had read many strange stories of the supernatural power of great artists. He knew that they were able to paint the minds of the originals into their portraits, whether of human beings or of creatures, so that through the spiritual force of the merit of their skill the pictures became endowed with life.

As the passion grew upon him the young lover believed that the spirit of the woman whom the portrait represented actually lived in the picture. As this thought formed itself in his mind he fancied that he could see the gentle rise and fall of her breast in breathing, and that her pretty lips, bright as the scarlet pomegranate bud, appeared to move as if about to speak to him.

One evening he was so filled with the sense of the reality of her presence that he sat down and composed a Chinese poem in praise of her beauty.

And the meaning of the high-flown diction ran something like this;

Thy beauty, sweet, is like the sun-flower:[2]
_The crescent moon of three nights old thy arched brows:
Thy lips the cherry's dewy petals at flush of dawn:_
Twin flakes of fresh-fallen snow thy dainty hands.
Blue-black, as raven's wing, thy clustering hair:
And as the sun half peers through rifts of cloud,
Gleams through thy robes the wonder of thy form..
Thy cheeks' dear freshness do bewilder me,
So pure, so delicate, rose-misted ivory:
And, like a sharp sword, pierce my breast
The glamour of thy dark eyes' messages.

Ah, as I gaze upon thy pictured form
I feel therein thy spirit is enshrined,
Surely thou liv'st and know'st my love for thee!
The one who unawares so dear a gift bestowed

Was verily the gods' own messenger
And sent by Heaven to link our souls in one.

'Tis sad that thou wert borne from thine own distant land
Far from thy race, and all who cherished thee;
Thy heart must lonely pine so far away,
In sooth thou need'st a mate to love and cherish thee.

But sorrow not, my picture love,
For Time's care-laden wings will never dim thy brow
From poisoned darts of Fate so placidly immune;
Anguish and grief will ne'er corrode thy heart,
And never will thy beauty suffer change:
While earthly beings wither and decay
Sickness and care will ever pass thee by,
For Art can grant where Love is impotent,
And dowers thee with immortality.

Ah me! could the high gods but grant the prayer
Of my wild heart, and passionate desire!
Step down from out thy cloistered niche,
Step down from out thy picture on the wall!
My soul is thirsting for thy presence fair
To crown my days with rapture--be my wife!
How swift the winged hours would then pass by
In bliss complete, and lovers' ecstasy:
My life, dear queen, I dedicate to thee,
Ah! make it thus a thousand lives to me![3]

Toshika smiled to himself at the wild impossibility of his own chimera. Such a hope as he had breathed to her and to himself belonged to the realm of reverie, and not to the hard world of everyday life. Supposing that beautiful creature to have ever lived and the portrait to be a true likeness of her, she must have died ages ago, long before ever he was born.

However, having written the poem carefully, he placed it above the scroll and read it aloud, apostrophizing the lady of the picture.

It was the delicious season of spring, and Toshika sat with the sliding screens open to the garden. The fragrance of peach blossoms was wafted into the room by the breath of a gentle wind, and as the light of day faded into a soft twilight, over the quiet and secluded scene a crescent moon shed her tender jewel-bright radiance.

Toshika felt unaccountably happy, he could not tell why and sat alone, reading and thinking deep into the night.

Suddenly, in the stillness of the midnight, a rustle behind him in the alcove caused him to turn round quickly.

What was his breathless amazement to see that the picture had actually taken life. The beautiful woman he so much admired detached herself from the paper on which she was depicted, stepped down on to the mats, and came gliding lightly towards him. He scarcely dared to breathe. Nearer and nearer she approached till she knelt opposite to where he sat by his desk. Saluting him she bowed profoundly.

The ravishment of her beauty and her charm held him speechless. He could not but look at her, for she was lovelier than anyone he had ever seen.

At last she spoke, and her voice sounded to him like the low, clear notes of the nightingale warbling in the plum-blossom groves at twilight.

"I have come to thank you for your love and devotion. Such a useless, ugly[4] creature as myself ought not to be so audacious as to appear before you, but the virtue of your poem was irresistible and drew me forth. I was so moved by your sympathy that I felt I must tell you in person of my gratitude for all your care and thought of me. If you really think of me as you have written, let me stay with you always."

Toshika rejoiced greatly when he heard these words. He put out his hand and taking hers said, "Ever since you came here I have loved you dearly. Consent to be my wife and we shall be happy evermore. Tell me your name and who you are and where you come from."

She answered with a smile inexpressibly sweet, while the tears glistened in her eyes.

"My name is Shorei (Little Beauty). My father's name is Sai. He was descended from the famous Kinkei. We lived in China at a place called Kinyo. One day, when I was eighteen years of age, bandits came and made a raid on our village and, with other fair women, carried me away. Thus I was separated from my parents and never saw them more. For many months I was carried from place to place and led a wandering life. Then, alas! who could have foretold it, I was seized by bad men and sold into slavery. The sorrow, the anguish and the horror I suffered in my helpless misery and homesickness you can never know. I longed every hour of the day for some tidings of my parents, for even now, I do not know what became of them. One day an artist came to the house of my captivity and looking at all the women there, he praised my face and described me as the Moon among the Stars. And he painted my picture and showed it to all his friends. In that way I became famous, for everyone talked of my beauty and came to see me. But I could not bear my life,

and being delicate, my unhappy lot and the uncertainty of my father's and mother's fate preyed upon my mind, so that I sickened and died in six months. This is the whole of my sad history. And now I have come to your country and to you. This must be because of a predestined affinity between us."

The young man's heart was filled with compassion as he listened to the sorrowful tale of the unfortunate woman, who had told him all her woes.

He felt that he loved her more than ever and that he must make up with his devotion for all the wretchedness she had suffered in the past.

They then began to compose poems together, and Toshika found that Shorei had had a literary education, that she was an adept in calligraphy and every kind of poetical composition. And his heart was filled with a great gladness that he had found a companion after his own heart.

They both became intensely interested in their poetical contest and as they composed they read their compositions aloud in turn, comparing and criticizing each other. At last, while Toshika was in the act of reciting a poem to Shorei, he suddenly awoke and found that he had been dreaming.

Unable to believe that his delightful experiences were but the memories of sleep he turned to the alcove. His cherished picture was hanging there and the lovely figure was limned as usual in living lines upon the paper. Was it all a delusion? As he watched the exquisite face before him, recalling with questioning wonder the events of the evening before, behold! the sweet mouth smiled at him, just as Shorei had smiled in his vision. Impatiently he waited for the darkness, hoping that sleep would again bring Shorei to his side. Night after night she came to him in his dreams, but of his happy adventure he spoke to none. He believed that in some miraculous way the power of poetry had evoked the spirit of the portrait. Centuries ago this ill-fated woman had lived and died an untimely death, and his love led her back to earth through the medium of an artist's skill and his own verse. Six months passed and Toshika desired nothing more in life than to possess Shorei as his bride for all the years to come.

[Illustration: When I was eighteen years of age, bandits ... made a raid on one village and ... carried me away.]

He never dreamed of change, but at last, one night, Shorei came looking very sad. She sat by his desk as was her wont, but instead of conversing or composing she began to weep.

Toshika was very troubled, for he had never seen her in such a mood.

"Tell me," he said anxiously, "What is the matter? Are you not happy with me?"

"Ah, it is not that," answered Shorei, hiding her face in her sleeve and sobbing; "never have I dreamed of such happiness as you have given me. It is because we are so happy that I cannot bear the pain of separation for a single night. But I must now leave you, alas! Our affinity in this world has come to an end."

Toshika could hardly believe her words. He looked at her in great distress as he asked:

"Why must we part? You are my wife and I will never marry any other woman. Tell me why you speak of parting?"

"To-morrow you will understand," she answered mysteriously. "We may meet no more now, but if you do not forget me I may see you again ere long."

Toshika had put out a hand and made as if to detain her, but she had risen and was gliding towards the alcove, and while he imploringly gazed at her she gradually faded from his sight and was gone.

Words cannot describe Toshika's despair. He felt that all the joy of life went with Shorei, and he could not endure the idea of living without her.

Slowly he opened his eyes and looked round the room. He heard the sparrows twittering on the roof, and in the light of dawn, as he thought, the night-lantern's flame dwindled to a fire-fly's spark.

He rose and rolled back the wooden storm-doors which shut the house in completely at night, and found that he had slept late, that the sun was already high in the heavens.

Listlessly he performed his toilet, listlessly he took his meal, and his old servants anxiously went about their work, fearing that their master was ill.

In the afternoon a friend came to call on Toshika. After exchanging the usual formalities on meeting, the visitor suddenly said:

"You are now of an age to marry. Will you not take a bride? I know of a lovely girl who would just suit you, and I have come to consult with you on the matter."

Toshika politely but firmly excused himself. "Do not trouble yourself

on my account, I pray you! I have not the slightest intention of marrying any woman at present, thank you," and he shook his head with determination.

The would-be go-between saw from the expression of Toshika's face that there was little hope in pressing his suit that day, so after a few commonplace remarks he took his leave and went home.

No sooner had the friend departed than Toshika's mother arrived. She, as usual, brought many gifts of things that she knew he liked, boxes of his favourite cakes and silk clothes for the spring season. Grateful for all her love and care, he thanked her affectionately and tried to appear bright and cheerful during her visit. But his heart was aching, and he could think of nothing but of the loss of Shorei, wondering if her farewell was final, or whether, as she vaguely hinted, she would come to him again. He said to himself that to hold her in his arms but once again he would gladly give the rest of his life.

His mother noticed his preoccupation and looked at him anxiously many times. At last she dropped her voice and said:

"Toshika, listen to me! Your father and I both think that you have arrived at an age when you ought to marry. You are our eldest son, and before we die we wish to see your son, and to feel sure that the family name will be carried on as it should be. We know of a beautiful girl who will make a perfect wife for you. She is the daughter of an old friend, and her parents are willing to give her to you. We only want your consent to the arrangement of the marriage."

Toshika, as his mother unfolded the object of her visit, understood the meaning of Shorei's warning, and said to himself:

"Ah, this is what Shorei meant--she foresaw my marriage, for she said that to-day I should understand; but she pledged herself at the same time to see me again--it is all very strange!"

Feeling that his fate was come upon him he consented to his mother's proposal.

She returned home delighted. She had had little doubt of her son's conformance to his parents' wishes, for he had always been of a tractable disposition. In anticipation, therefore, of his consent to the marriage, she had already bought the necessary betrothal presents, and the very next day these were exchanged between the two families.

Toshika, in the meantime, watched the picture day by day. This was his only consolation, for Shorei, his beloved, visited him no more in his dreams. His life was desolate without her and his heart yearned for her

sweet presence. Had it not been for her promise to come to him again he knew that he would not care to live. He felt, however, that she still loved him and in some way or other would keep her promise to him, and for this waited. Of his approaching marriage he did not dare to think. He was a filial son, and knew that he must fulfil his duty to his parents and to the family.

[Illustration: When the bride was led into the room and seated opposite Toshika, what was his bewildering delight to see that she was ... the lady-love of his picture]

As the days went by Toshika noticed that the picture lost by degrees its wonderful vitality. Slowly from the face the winning expression and from the figure the tints of life faded out, till at last the drawing became just like an ordinary picture. But he was left no time to pine over the mystery of the change, for a summons from his mother called him home to prepare for the marriage. He found the whole household teeming with the importance of the approaching event. At last the momentous day dawned.

His mother, proud of the product of her looms, set out in array his wedding robes, handwoven by herself. He donned them as in a dream, and then received the congratulations of his relatives and retainers and servants.

In those old days the bride and bridegroom never saw each other till the wedding ceremony. When the bride was led into the room and seated opposite Toshika, what was his bewildering delight to see that she was no stranger but the lady-love of his picture, the very same woman he had already taken to wife in his dream life.

And yet she was not quite the same, for when Toshika, a few days later, joyfully led her to his own home and compared her with the portrait, she was even ten times more beautiful.

[Footnote 1: The floor of the Japanese room is padded with special grass mats over two inches thick. On these the bed quilts are laid out at night and packed away in cupboards in the daytime.]

[Footnote 2: _Prumus UmØ_, or Plum blossom, the Japanese symbol of womanly virtue and beauty.]

[Footnote 3: Rendered into English verse by my friend, Countess Iso-ko-Mutsu.]

[Footnote 4: It is a Japanese custom for a woman to speak thus depreciatingly of herself.]

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